The Fault in My Code

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The Fault in My Code

by LiaS0

Summary

Soulmate AU: Soulmates find their other half when they look into their eyes. After the next time they sleep, they wake with one eye the color of their intended.

Will Graham avoids eyes. He's never wanted a soulmate, never wanted to be told by the universe who he was supposed to feel a connection to. He already struggles enough with connections, thank you very much. As a psychiatrist, he works with soulmates who have lost their other half through various means, part of a social system that regards the journey to your soulmate as the most important thing a person can do. Coerced by Jack Crawford to consult on a case where the assailant is targeting soulmates, Will finds himself turning to the notorious Dr. Lecter to gain insight on how he's choosing the soulmates to target.

Things go horribly awry when he looks into Hannibal's eyes, though. The next morning, he wakes up with one eye blue, the other maroon. He's never wanted a soulmate, least of all one behind bars for murdering dozens of people and eating them. Hannibal thinks it's delightful - it's been dreadfully boring since he was locked up.

Romance, thriller, mayhem, mystery, soulmate au with a realistic twist, and a grumpy Will Graham

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: 【授翻/Hannibal】The Fault In My Code by erming1122

Two Blue Eyes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 1:

"I have a soulmate, Dr. Graham. You can look me in the eyes."

"Some people reported their eyes changing color, even after looking at a person with a soulmate. That's how the polyamory act was passed."

"I know enough about you that I can safely say we're not soulmates," Jack said dryly.

"That's nice."

"Will you at least look at the file?"

Will glanced down to the file between them, and he slid it closer for inspection, idly biting his thumb. It was a nice setting, if he was being honest. Jack Crawford of the FBI cornered him at his favorite park with the sun shining and the birds tweeting with reckless abandon. Children played just down the small incline. Will was going to have to be civil.

"I work with grief counseling now, Jack," he said, opening it. The gruesome body, split down the middle and laid on two parts of the bed didn't shock him, although it should have. Jack didn't ambush him in a pretty place to show him photos of garden layouts. He pulled out another photo of a mirrored shard in the eye on the left. The eye on the right had been stabbed out, completely obliterated.

"Soulmate grief counseling, from what I've heard. People who've lost their soulmate, and they have to try living in a world like this without the other half of them."

"And this one is making soulmates feel that grief…" he flipped to another photo, sighed. "I haven't done a psychological profile in years. *Years*."

"I just need you to look."

"I don't want to look," he said, staring down at them. It made his eyes, two solid seafoam blue eyes, burn. "You know what looking does."

"I know what Dr. Bloom told me, and she said you were the best damn profiler she'd ever seen. She said you once walked into a room, noted blood trajectory and said you'd hoped you could have gotten a higher spread because you wanted to see what the blood would look like on the lightbulbs."

"He wanted the bulbs to burst," Will said after a moment. He closed the file and rubbed his eyes. "He wanted to see how much blood it'd take for the bulb to burst."

“You saw that. Your empathy is something that’s still being discussed in psychological circles-”

“You’d think they’d respect another doctor’s desire at privacy-” Will interjected.

“-and your knowledge and understanding of psychological behavior of soulmates has led to several captures of very dangerous people,” Jack finished. “This is clearly a soulmate dispute, as you could see from just those photos. Genuine anger. This is the second person he’s done this to, and if what little understanding we have of him is correct, he’s going to strike again within a month.”

“I saw the first on the news,” Will said, propping his chin up with the palm of his hand. He studied Jack’s hideous paisley tie. “He covets. Chooses who he thinks should be *his* soulmate, and he makes them his in death.”

“Is this a man whose lost their soulmate and is committing crimes of passion?”

Will let out a derisive snort and jerked his head in a no. Soulmates committing crimes of passion in the aftermath of losing their ‘beloved’ were given soft sentences, met with understanding and mouths that softened with empathy rather than tightened in anger. If sentenced, their jail time was such that they might as well have called it a holiday.

“Is he messy?”

“Semen, saliva…a bit of blood, but not enough to go on.”

“I really don’t want this, Jack,” he said.

“I know. After Hobbs…”

“We’re not going to discuss Hobbs,” he said pleasantly. He curled his bottom lip into his mouth, wet it, and sneered. “Molly isn’t going to be happy.”

“Any laws you could have used to forcefully decline are null and void with her. You’re not soulmates.”

“No,” Will agreed, and he, not for the first time, felt a stab of relief at the thought. “No, we’re not.

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Molly worked for a small dating agency that helped people find their soulmates through various means. That being said, neither she nor Will particularly enjoyed the idea of someone forcing their hand in who they felt a kinship with, so when they accidentally met eyes with one another after a lurching train stop threw her into him, they both almost wept with relief when their eyes didn’t change the next day.

They’d been together ever since.

“Still two blues?” she asked jokingly when he came in. Neither of them were much in the way of gourmet foods, but she made a homemade pizza to die for from a recipe on Pinterest.

“Still two blues,” he reassured her. The air smelled of baking dough and hot marinara sauce.

“Carla at work was helping a man set up his account two days ago. Came in yesterday with one green and one brown. He came in today and demanded a refund since he didn’t even get to use the account,” Molly said, coming out from the kitchen to give him a peck on the cheek. “Boss is giving her a bonus, but I don’t know why for.”

“Your system works, that’s why. It’s so he doesn’t have to buy a wedding gift when she tosses in a two weeks and elopes at the end of the month.”

“Is that how you say it to your clients?”

“We make lists of the good things in their life that are still present, and we brainstorm hobbies that will help them get out of the house so that they can rebuild personal boundaries and maintain stable social circles for a support system.”

“Good use of your doctorate,” she teased.

He grinned and headed into the kitchen, grabbing a glass out of the cupboard for some water. At the sight of two glasses in the otherwise empty sink, he paused, staring at them with the hints of anger licking at his gut.

“I didn’t do cheesy bread, but I did make the dough from scratch since I know you like it,” she said, following after him. She patted his rear idly and reached around him for the dishcloth by the sink. “I even added fresh garlic rather than garlic salt, since you griped last time.”

“Did you send Jack Crawford to the park after me?” he asked. “Or was he just a really good guesser?”

Molly had the grace not to lie. She wiped down the counter where she’d done most of her cooking, blonde hair tucked behind her ears.

“I told him, since I thought you’d like it better in a public place rather than your own house.”

“That’s true,” he agreed. He gulped down his water so that he didn’t shout.

“Are you going to help him, Will?”

He finished the water, a little iron in the aftertaste since the city couldn’t be bothered to fix up the pipes. He turned the glass around in his hand, thinking. Ruminating. “If I don’t, he’s going to keep killing. They already talked to Bloom, and she referred them to me. That means she can’t say for certain, but she knows I could say for certain. She doesn’t refer people to me just to be an ass.”

“If you do?” Molly asked. She finished wiping down the counter and looked at him, frowning. “What happens if you do?”

“…Molly, you didn’t know me when I did that kind of work. I wasn’t pleasant.”

“Some would argue that you’re not pleasant now,” she said. Her teasing smile faltered, though. Her blue eyes were still as pale as undisturbed shallow water, no hint of green or sapphire at the edges. He marveled at their color, face unmarred with clashing eyes that didn’t match. Three years with her, and not once had they changed. Every time he saw them, he wanted to weep with relief at the thought.

“I don’t know. I could relapse, I could maybe…lose a bit of myself.” He filled the cup up again, to do something with his hands. “What if I meet someone’s eyes? What if I get inside my own head too far? I won’t be the same if I do this. You won’t know me the same.”

“You’d told me enough about the things you did for the FBI. You won’t be the same, but I won’t mind getting to know you all over again, if you don’t mind.”

There it was. Molly didn’t mind. This time he sipped the water, letting the mineral taste linger as he stared overhead at the ceiling fan that turned about lazily.

“He’s going after soulmates,” he said.

“That means you and I are safe, at least,” she reassured him.

Molly was safe. Will Graham was going to help the FBI hunt a killer. He blessedly hadn’t yet found a soulmate.

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Planes were a terrible place to avoid eyes. Everyone was a stranger, and the idea of meeting the other half of their soul on a getaway was a dream come true. He could count on both hands and a foot how many airlines advertised someone meeting a stranger on an international flight, waking up after a nap to find that one of their eyes had changed color. The idea that you could meet ‘the one’ on a business flight to Cincinnati? Fantasy made reality by Tacoma Airlines.

He found himself crammed into a window seat with a chatterbox beside him, contemplating his lack of mismatched eyes with their lack of mismatched eyes, and it was only when he pulled out the case files and began going over them did they finally quieted down. They must have seen the bodies.

Because it was on the FBI’s dime, he called Alana... just because.

“Did you send Jack Crawford after me?” he asked once he’d been patched through.

“I told him that you’d have insight that I didn’t, but I also recommended that he leave you the hell alone,” Alana said. She recognized his voice despite the passing of years.

“I’m headed to Baltimore.”

“That’s where the last body was, right?” Alana asked.

“He wants me to see the crime scene. This morning, he also got a call from Dr. Chilton at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane saying that one of the inmates there had information regarding the case.”

“Promising,” Alana said wryly. They both remembered Frederick Chilton from school, and it wasn’t precisely with fondness.

“Since you inadvertently sent him to me, I’m going to use you as leverage to get him to let me talk to the inmate. He’s always had a thing for you.”

“Margot doesn’t let me forget it,” she sighed.

“How is Margot?”

“She’s great. I’ll let her know you called.” A beat as Will flipped through the files again. Beside him, his chatterbox companion had fallen asleep. “Who was the inmate?”

“Hannibal Lecter,” Will said.

“Were you going to tell me that, or were you going to wait for me to ask?” Alana wondered. She was as perceptive as he was surly.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t ask,” he said.

“What, because I was his TA?” She laughed, but it wasn’t entirely sincere. “Will, that was years ago. I’ve actually spoken with him long after, when I passed my board. He was proud of me.”

“He once said that, given the chance, he’d have eaten you,” Will reminded her.

“Thankfully, I was far more useful to him blind than in a roast,” she quipped. “Have you ever met him before?”

“I haven’t.”

“…I wouldn’t recommend it. He may have information, but if he’s just now deciding to share it, there can’t be a good reason.”

“I don’t have a past with him, so that will either gain me an edge or lose me one. At the very least, I wasn’t running around publishing theories on him like the others. They made his shit list.”

“Look, I’m able to say that I ‘survived’ him by being too blind to see, but that doesn’t mean I take him lightly. Will…” Her voice trailed off as she struggled to find the words. “I can’t think of a nice way to say it.”

“Say it ugly, Alana,” he urged.

“Your way of thinking is something I think he’d see in an instant. He’d use it to chew you up and spit you out. He gets into the strongest of minds and…you read the reports. He’s not like other psychopaths.”

“He’s not,” Will agreed. Enough studies had come out that he’d realized most of those writing them didn’t have a handle on the man. When Dr. Chilton allowed Lecter to publish articles of his own in the journals, that solidified his theory.

“You’ve been out a long time. Profiling a killer at the back of the task force is one thing. Walking into a room with Dr. Lecter is another thing entirely.”

“If he has information, Alana…I don’t think Jack can get it. *You* know Jack.”

“I know Jack,” Alana agreed.

“It’s part of the investigation,” he said. “Mostly I just called to say that if you’re in any of the areas I’m visiting, I’d like to see you.”

“Evasion techniques don’t work on me, Will.”

“They would if you let them,” he replied.

“Please be careful…you know, I really do wish people just left you the hell alone. You’ve done enough, and I’ve heard nothing but great things about your practice with grief counseling soulmates.”

“Thanks.”

“Still no one for yourself?” she asked.

“I have Molly,” he defended. Molly was better than any soulmate. It was an active choice to be together, and that sounded far more romantic than being together by force.

“Tell her I say hello. Try to get some sleep on the flight too, alright?”

“I will.”

He didn’t sleep, but he continued to peruse the files, staring at the bodies of the two people whose eyes had been gouged out. It didn’t take a genius to see he’d removed the eye that had changed color, the one that didn’t ‘belong’.

It didn’t smack of soulmate rage, though. There wasn’t an aching pain of loss, but of greed, of need. He’d have to revisit the crime scene, taste the air and the screams that still echoed in it. The idea of stepping into such a place made his stomach turn, but there he was. Molly said he could save people, Jack said he was the only one to help, and there was a psychopath in a psychiatric hospital that claimed to know something about it.

He almost missed the soulmate grief counseling sessions.

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Frederick Chilton had two brown eyes. Will studied the desk in front of them, hands clasped behind his back so that if he had to curl them into fists, the other doctor didn't see.

"Dr. Bloom phoned me last night, said you were coming. I got another call from Agent Crawford, too, but his was more in the assurance of my cooperation with you. As I said to them both, I am more than happy to be of assistance, seeing as how if this person is apprehended they'll be brought to my institution."

"We appreciate your cooperation," Will said.

"I've worked with Bloom quite a few times, Dr. Graham, but I haven't really seen you since school. Good work with the grief counseling?"

He didn't take the jab.

"I'd imagine after consulting with the FBI, it wouldn't be as…exciting." Chilton stood and moved about the room, an air of arrogance to him that smelled like sandalwood. He watched Will out of the corner of his eye, much like he would one of his patients. "But here you are, and I've got Dr. Hannibal Lecter downstairs that supposes he knows the person you're looking for."

"We're going to need as private a space as possible so that I can question him. I may have to pass him some papers, if that's alright?"

"How many times are you going to question him?"

"I'm not sure yet."

"Well, to start, he'll remain in his cell. We have strict protocol with Hannibal Lecter, and I don't deviate from it in any way, shape, or form. If you're worried about eavesdroppers, I can place small partitions on either side of you, but there he will remain.

"I'm sure Dr. Bloom regaled you with tales of him, to try and prepare you for the person you're going to meet, but I must tell you –this is nothing you've seen before. I've heard of cases you've consulted on, too, and I maintain that statement, Dr. Graham."

Will sat down since he supposed this was going to take a bit.

"You may pass him soft paper, but nothing else. Use the food drawer to initiate that exchange, not the bars. No pens, paperclips, stapled documents, or anything that could be potentially used as a weapon. If he attempts to pass you something, do not take it. If he attempts to ask for things to be used as a weapon, alert an orderly waiting just down the hall. You think these are obvious things, but I've seen a side to him that none of the journals have seen.

"Just a year after his being here, perfectly congenial and polite, he complained of stomach pains. Instead of remaining in with the nurse, the orderlies stepped outside for a smoke break."

Chilton paused, to better savor the build-up. Will stared at his argyle tie dispassionately.

"They managed to save one of her eyes," he finally revealed. "His pulse was first at seventy-two, but did not rise above eighty-five throughout the entire ordeal, even when his shoulder was dislocated, even when he swallowed her tongue."

"I'll keep that in mind," he said. He had no plans of being in such close proximity to Lecter.

"See that you do," Chilton urged. He turned back to face Will, tucking his hands into his pockets. "Twelve sessions I've had with him, twelve. Even Dr. Bloom took a whack at him, since they once worked together. Nothing. He is impenetrable."

"I'll see what I can do," Will said.

"Yes, with your reconstruction of crime scenes," Chilton said, and a spark of interest made him rock back on his heels. "You've caught many a person, especially in regards to crimes regarding soulmates, yes? You'll have to tell me, since I've quite a few soulmates in this institution, just how you recreate that? No, no, not today," he said, waving a hand as Will shifted in his chair. "Bloom told me you were off limits today, she made me *swear* it. Another time."

"I'd like to see Dr. Lecter now," Will said.

The maximum security part of the institution has large deadbolts that slid shut with a disturbing clang. Will didn't jump at the noise, although he did tighten his grip on his folder. When an orderly pushed a cart down the way, he masked his footsteps behind them, wanting a moment to see Dr. Lecter before Dr. Lecter saw him. He'd sat in on the court trial, mostly a support for Alana since she testified against him. The man, sitting accused of multiple first degree murders and cannibalism, was serene as a spring morning. Even when he was sentenced, he didn't complain. He allowed himself to be led away, his flat eyes looking across the crowd, pinning each person that'd spoken against him like butterflies to a display board.

He lay on his cot, head propped against the wall with a pillow, eyes closed. Will stood at the bars, staring. He was long, lean, no sign of faded muscle despite his captivity. A cookbook sat propped onto his chest, and five seconds into Will staring, his eyes opened.

"I'd recognize that aftershave anywhere," he drawled. "Alana Bloom often came to my office with it reeking along her neck and mouth when she was my TA."

"I keep getting it for Christmas," he said.

Along the room, taped to the walls, skylines of various places were shaded with acute detail, from the Eiffel tower to churches in what looked to be Italy. More paper flooded a table bolted to the floor, and pens of various color were scattered across it.

“Christmas,” Lecter said, and he sat up, closing the book on his chest with a *snap*. “I’ve sent Alana Christmas cards every year, and she thanks me every year, too.”

“Dr. Bloom is all politeness.”

“Do sit down, Dr. Graham. I believe that just down the hall, there are chairs held within a closet. At least, that’s what it sounds like.” Lecter stood, and in his off-white jumpsuit, his skin was somewhat sallow, although his hair was combed and neat.

“The orderly is getting it for me, as well as partitions.”

“Partitions?” Lecter’s brows lifted. “Ah, you mean this to be private. I’m intrigued.”

The orderly returned, and underneath the light Will noted two different colored eyes. One was hazel, the other as green as pine. Will helped him set up the partitions, and he wondered at Chilton allowing someone with a soulmate to work in the maximum security. Normally, having something society was too terrified to lose so close to danger was a bad thing. He wasn’t sure if it was Chilton treating soulmates as equals, or if he was jealous his own eyes were still the same color.

Lecter waited until everything was set up for Will before he sat down, crossing one leg elegantly over the other. Will studied his chin, the way it lifted.

“That was quite polite of you,” he said.

“Always happy to help.”

“Is that what you do now, Dr. Graham? Help? I know you once profiled killers for the FBI, consulted on cases of the truly criminal. Why, you even weighed in on my case when they asked you to. Now, you give counseling to soulmates, so I’m told.”

“I do.”

“I see you have two blue eyes; no soulmate of your own, I see. Afraid to look at people? Afraid of what you’ll find? Of just who you’d become attached to, given the way of your mind?”

“Dr. Lecter, you informed Dr. Chilton of your having information regarding the recent attacks on married soulmates. I’m here to ask about that, if you don’t mind.”

“Are you always so blunt, Dr. Graham?” Lecter asked. His lip curled around his name. “No small talk where I’m concerned?”

“No small talk in general,” Will said.

“Small talk is all that I enjoy these days,” Lecter said with a sigh. “With Dr. Chilton, that’s all one can truly do. I bet he took one look at you and tried to paw at your mind like a senior at a freshman girl’s virginity. I’ve read about you in the journals, psychiatrists baffled at your perfect blend of neuroses that made you quite the asset for the FBI.”

“I’ve read about you, too,” he said.

“Mostly the cannibalizing, I’m sure,” he drawled.

“Mostly.”

“One of the grad students that wrote to me framed the letter I sent back. Quaint.”

“I have the file here, if you want to take a look at it. I could really use the help, Dr. Lecter.”

“You haven’t offered me anything, yet,” Lecter said, and Will felt his eyes digging into his skin. He stared pointedly at the hands that clasped Lecter’s knee. “When someone wants something from me, they usually offer a reward.”

“I wasn’t going to do you the disservice.”

“Disservice? Dr. Graham, whatever do you mean?”

“You will either help, or you won’t. Offering you baubles when Dr. Chilton already tries to sweeten you up with what you have in there is disrespectful, isn’t it?”

“You have tanned hands. They’re not quite the hands of a psychiatrist, but they’re not yet the hands of a manual laborer. A part time job, hmm? Something to keep you busy in between group sessions and grieving patients?”

“You told Dr. Chilton that you had information, Dr. Lecter. It wasn’t the other way around.” God, Alana was right. Speaking with him made Will feel like he had ants crawling into the back of his mind, chewing through everything.

“A ring on the right finger; a promise band, but two eyes of the same color. You know what, Dr. Graham, I’m curious.”

Will stood up, folder in hand.

“Good bye, Dr. Lecter.”

“Let me see the folder, and I’ll help you,” Lecter said, standing up.

Will crossed over to the small food box, sliding it open. It took a bit of force to stuff it in, but when he did he shoved it over to Lecter. Lecter opened it and retrieved the folder, his hands graceful, smooth despite the rough cell he rotted in.

It was as Will was turning away from him though, that something happened that he should have honestly prepared himself for. What had Chilton said? Don’t get too close; keep him in your sights? When he went to sit back down, Hannibal grabbed his wrist tightly through the bars, and Will jerked around, a curse hissing from his lips.

He looked directly into Dr. Lecter’s eyes.

Lecter grinned, an awful, terrible thing. Underneath the light, his eyes were maroon, and the moment he met his gaze, Lecter released his wrist and stepped away, heading back to his chair in order to peruse the file. Will stumbled back, heart lurching, but he didn't sit back down. He moved to the partition, and he prayed that the rasping gasps of breath coming from him weren't audible to Lecter just across the way.

"Give me some time to go through these, Dr. Graham, and come back. You and I will have much to discuss, I think," he called out, unheeding of Will's panic.

Will all but fled from the maximum security.

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He woke some hours later on his hotel bed, his neck at an odd angle. He sat up, groaned, and popped his neck, letting it carry down his back as he stretched. The hotel he was put up in wasn't the best, but it did boast a complimentary breakfast.

He washed the taste of sleep from his mouth, rubbed his face, and considered calling Molly. He reconsidered when he thought of Lecter's hand on his wrist, branding him. He washed his hands, splashed his face, then looked up at the bathroom mirror, freezing with the hand towel pressed to his mouth.

One seafoam blue eye, one maroon.

Chapter End Notes

I love soulmate ideas, especially people within the system that question soulmates or the random outliers that occur in a society like that. I'm not sure if this will be a long one or a short one, but rest assured it won't get in the way of my other works! You can connect with me on tumblr as elfnerdherder :)

One Eye Blue, the Other Maroon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 2:

Will wasted no time in returning to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

Frantic fingers combed his bangs down over the hideous color, something resembling blood left too long on a tile floor. Normally for work, Molly told him he was at his most professional with it combed back, but until he could find *something*, he was stuck with mussing his hair like he was back in college again.

He looked at his face in the rental car mirror: one eye blue, the other maroon.

"Fuck," he swore, drumming fingers on the steering wheel. This wasn't happening. This was a misunderstanding.

This was a fucking misunderstanding.

He was let back in, thankfully by a man who took no notice of his eyes. Barney was the head of the orderlies, and he seemed only concerned with reiterating Chilton's rules about visiting Lecter.

"He said you were coming back, so we took down the partitions but left the chair. We can set it back up, if you like?" Barney looked at him.

"Yes, please. I want to keep the investigation as quiet as possible," Will said. When they stepped into the dim light, the knot in his guts uncurled but only just. It'd be harder for people to see his eye in low light.

"Sounds good, Dr. Graham."

He followed behind Barney to the hall he'd been in just hours before. His steps hiccuped, though, when he reached Lecter's cell, remnants of the grip on his wrist as vivid as though it'd just happened. He tucked his hands behind his back as Barney went to get the partitions again, and he looked to the cell, swallowing convulsively.

Lecter stood with his back to the cell, facing his drawings. His shoulders were broad, muscles taut underneath his jumpsuit. He gave no indication of Barney or Will's arrival, merely stood with stiff attention, his own hands resting at his sides.

"Welcome back, Dr. Graham," he said when Barney left them.

"What the fuck did you do to me," Will demanded, and Hannibal turned at his blunt use of words, brow lifted curiously.

“I don’t understand; of what am I being accused?”

Will found himself striding to the bars, stopping just a breath away from crashing into them as he jammed a finger towards his eyes, his breath rushing out in a hiss.

“What. Did. You. Do. To. Me.”

Lecter stared at him, and Will stared back. Two maroon eyes. He thought to rage about it, but the logic in his mind whispered that you had to *sleep* for it to work, and although Will had taken a nap to try and pry Lecter from his mind and his skin, the murderous doctor had probably spent his time occupied with the rather large file Will had given him, stimulated by the macabre display.

He glided over, an elegance to his step belied by the flat expression on his face. His gaze traced over Will’s face, and with the barest of twitches he fought to keep himself composed. Will noted it, resented it. “Two blue eyes, now one. Did you meet someone, Dr. Graham?”

“What did you do to me when you grabbed me? Did you-”

“You are a psychiatrist with specialties in the abnormalities and behaviors of soulmates, Dr. Graham. You know almost every single article of information regarding their creation and the fundamentals of their behavior. You know exactly what happened.”

Will shook his head, refusing to let the words stick. This wasn’t real.

This wasn’t real.

“We’re not…this isn’t…”

“In truth, I’m just as surprised as you are. If I thought I could, I would sleep now to see if the effects took hold. I have never had a soulmate, but I’ve read about the emotions that are evoked when both sides of the psyche lock into place.” It was impossible to tell if he was lying. Lecter tilted his head as he talked, like the angle somehow gave better access to the soul, and Will could definitely see pleasure in his discomfort now.

Will rocked back onto his heels, fingers raking through his hair.

“…You did this on purpose,” he said. “You wanted to find a way to get into my head.”

“I grabbed you to force you to look at me, yes.” Lecter’s shoulder twitched into a shrug. “You weren’t keeping eye contact, and I thought to myself, ‘what happens when he does? How does the good doctor react when he looks into my eyes?'”

“You purposefully initiated eye contact to make me unsure, to find the right angle to knock me aside.”

“I wanted to know just how unsettled you’d become when meeting the eyes of a person. My theory proved correct.”

“This isn’t proving a theory, this is-” His voice broke off as he gestured, hands falling lamely to rest on his hips. “This isn’t happening to me," he muttered to himself.

“Your worst fears, Will Graham?” Lecter wondered. “A psychiatrist with all manner of knowledge regarding soulmates whose worst fear is becoming one? Let alone, attaining one with such a…palate as mine? I did ask if you feared such a thing because of the sort of person you knew you’d…*connect* with.”

“…Your eyes may not turn,” Will struggled to comfort himself. “There are outliers,” he added, and Lecter moved away from him, nodding in agreement.

“Yes, my eyes may not turn, and you may never have to feel what it’d be like to have a connection with someone like me.” He paused by his table, fingers caressing the file. “Then again, you know exactly what it feels like to connect with something far uglier. Perhaps that’s why you’re so afraid. You know precisely what it’s like to have killers in your head.” A beat. “Please, sit.”

Will sat, and whatever hold or sway he’d had with Hannibal Lecter through his nonchalance before was gone. As he twisted, rolled, and compartmentalized his feelings, he was filled with a sort of dread, something akin to shame. He rolled his neck, popped it, and he wondered just what Alana Bloom would say if she could see him now. Don’t let him get into your head, indeed.

“This is a shy boy, Will,” he said, gaze flicking up to try and catch Will’s eye. Will stared pointedly at the table leg. “Not unlike you, he carries a distinct trouble with eyes and how people view him through theirs.”

“He wanted to see his eye color in their eyes,” he forced himself to say.

“This isn’t someone with a soulmate. They haven’t felt that…*irresistible* pull to another person. They resent soulmates.”

“Yes.”

“You knew that already, though, didn’t you, Dr. Graham?” Lecter glanced up at him, the fringe across his forehead fanning just over his eyes.

“I wanted to hear you confirm it.”

“Did it occur to you that he has some sort of deformity –at least, he believes he has some sort of deformity?”

“He broke all of the mirrors in the houses, not just enough to use the shards.”

“Yes,” Lecter praised, and Will felt his scrutiny like a fine tipped needle grazing over his skin. “Perhaps that is why he thinks he hasn’t found his soulmate. He thinks no soul could touch his when he has a face like that.”

“You said you had information regarding him, Dr. Lecter. I can understand the nuances of his ‘why’ but I need to know ‘how’.”

“Given what you’ve just endured, I believe you could call me Hannibal,” Lecter said politely. "You're much more exposed to me now, therefore my first name holds the familiarity you deserve." Heat rose up Will’s neck, and he glowered.

“Will you tell me how?”

“Will you call me Hannibal?” Dr. Lecter wondered.

“…Will you tell me how, Hannibal?”

Hannibal smiled, fine lines surrounding his eyes and deepening the grooves by his cheeks. Will ground his teeth.

“It wasn’t just the how that first brought you here, was it? You’ve left consulting for the FBI –three years, yes? In that time, you’ve worked with grief counseling, you’ve worked with therapy for soulmates of all forms, shapes, and sizes, lost the taste for the criminally insane, locked deep, willing yourself to forget. Your empathy has made you bitter about soulmates, able to feel but not-quite touch, see but not experience.”

“My empathy?” Will’s lip curled.

“As brazen and apparent to me as it is now, as it was the moment you sat down and avoided my stare, I have had an open access to the psychiatric journals for some time, Dr. Graham. Your mind has been a topic of delightful discussion among some of the more popular authors, especially after your stunning display with Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

“Even before, when I first encountered you, it was apparent. Your college years were rife with a struggle of understanding, of an inability to blend into the crowd because you were the crowd. Even in your most intimate moments with Alana Bloom, you were unable to quite make that leap that transcended flesh. Is that finally why things ended with the two of you as nothing more than friends?”

“I didn’t know you when-”

“You were never in my class, but you were often with Dr. Bloom. That was enough to see what I had to see. You may not recall me during that time, Dr. Graham, but I most certainly recall you.” Hannibal’s head tilted the other way as he spoke, thin lips moving rapid, fast. It was aviary, like a bird of prey. “You came here today to get a taste of the insanity you’re supposed to replicate in your mind since you’re out of practice. I ask you, why did you not just look in the mirror?” A pause, and a sadistic expression lightened his face. “Ah, but you did…that is what brought you back.”

“Fuck you,” Will seethed.

“How interesting it will be to see what happens when you’re forced to reconcile the monsters you contain within yourself, now that one of them is made apparent by visual alone,” he continued, unheeding of Will’s anger. “Part of me wills my eyes to remain the same, to better analyze your behavior, but I cannot analyze it if you never return, therefore; I want them to change. If they do, you have to come back.”

“We’re finished,” Will said, standing up. He thought about putting the chairs and partitions away, but ultimately he didn’t want to linger until Hannibal’s stare. He strode towards the partition, hands flexing into fists at his sides, trying to ignore the derisive laugh echoing back behind him.

“On the contrary, we’re just getting started.”

-

He drove to the house just outside of Baltimore, grip tight on the steering wheel. Hannibal Lecter wasn’t going to give him too much regarding the killer, not now that he had something interesting to bat at like a cat with a ball of yarn. He thought about calling Jack, then tossed the idea.

It wasn’t illegal to find your soulmate in a jail cell, although it was considered a delicate topic to broach. Those whose partners were locked away for crimes could visit at almost any time, their access granted due to the nature of the person they *felt* but could not touch. Will could name half a dozen of his patients that had soulmates in various places where they could not be reached, be it the military or a classified operation. Their eyes were constantly lost, and they complained of something much like a phantom limb. Was that going to happen to *him*? Was he going to *miss* Lecter?

No.

It wasn’t something to worry over. Hannibal’s eyes weren’t going to change, and he was going to be *fine*. He would be an outlier, one part of a connection that didn’t quite break through, and people would see him and assume Molly was his soulmate. She’d laugh it off with him, they’d consider colored contacts, ultimately just let the oddity ride out until the shock faded.

Everything was going to be fine.

He got out of the car after parking in the driveway. He noted the gravel, the noise he’d made when he came in –the killer hadn’t used the driveway. He cut the Baltimore Police Department tape on the front door and stepped into the entryway, pulling gloves on with a sharp *snap* that cut through the haze around him.

There were no screams there.

He didn’t find them in the kitchen, nor did he find them on the stairs. It wasn’t until the bedroom that he walked in and was hit in the chest with the sudden *want* that he stopped, staring. Here is where it all occurred.

While the rest of the house held stagnant air, no sudden movements or blood spray, it was a literal bath in the room. Jack said real estate agents wanted it gone, *stat*, but one week after the killings wasn’t soon enough to start making the place look livable again. It left him with the stale tang of blood and mirror shards scattered across the floor. Since Lecter had his file, he busied himself trying to recreate, to understand. He found a place on the floor, crossed his legs, and closed his eyes.

When he came to, he called Jack, walking down the stairs.

“Did you get in okay?”

“The detective at the precinct was more than happy to get me a key to the place. They knew not to kick the door in when they saw the car.”

“I told them we’re cooperating. No hiding evidence. No one-upping. This shit has to stop, and I told them this isn’t a pissing contest.”

“No one’s pissing anywhere, but there’s a lot of spit,” Will said. He walked outside, using the backdoor, and he stood in their yard, looking around it. “He left the husband alive.”

“Husband wasn’t home when this happened.”

“It happened at night, though.”

“Conference in the city that ran late.”

“Hmm.” Will turned about in the yard, chewing his bottom lip in thought. “I think he had to touch her.”

“You know he touched her, we found semen and-”

“No, no, with his hands, Jack. She was beautiful, gorgeous, and he wanted to see himself in her.” As an afterthought, “She had pretty feet.”

“You’re losing me, Will.”

“He used gloves, but he had to touch her. There’s talcum powder on her, right? He took his gloves off. Had to put his hands somewhere –the eyes? Can you check the eyes?”

“…Damn,” Jack swore, and it was triumphant.

“Her nail polish looked fresh, too. Check for prints in the polish. I bet the bastard wasn’t too patient to wait for it all to dry.”

Jack hung up with a shout for someone to get Price, and Will spun about, staring at the large, six-foot privacy fence. It was a good place to be, if one was a killer and needed to get a breather. Spacious, secluded. Will squinted up at the sun and sighed.

In reality, Mrs. Hess deserved to die. She had a soulmate, but it wasn’t the right soulmate, and the facts were the facts. By the end of the night, Will was sure that in the killer's mind, she agreed, too.

-

He called Molly after a long shower where he scrubbed every inch of himself until his flesh was pink. He sat, dripping on the bed and laid back, phone pressed tight to his ear.

“Hey, stud,” she said breathily.

“More of a French fry,” he corrected.

“Salty, cooked to perfection and slotted into a cardboard box with a hundred others like you?”

“A little limp and a little greasy,” he corrected, and she laughed. In the background, he heard the dull murmur of the news.

“That new news anchorman popped onto screen with one green eye, one black,” she informed him.

“Did they make a story about it?”

“It was just after the breaking news, when they went into details about the *Soul Stealer*.” Molly whispered the title the way a child murmured the name of a scary monster.

“Is that what they’re calling him?” Will’s lip curled in disgust.

“It’s a bit of a panic, in reality. He’s just found his soulmate, you know, and that’s how he made a Segway into his good luck. His partner, Christy Kelly, wasn’t too happy about it. Two brown eyes, still.”

“If hers turn, we’re changing the channel to a different news channel,” Will warned her. The reason they liked Channel 4 was because almost none of the reporters had soulmates, meaning they got actual news rather than exposes written with only soulmates in mind.

“I think channel 12 has a cute little weather boy with no soulmate; something to consider.” She laughed at Will’s snort.

They fell into silence, and he listened to the sound of her breathing as she worked on what he suspected to be Sudoku. He imagined laying out on the couch beside her, rather than in the hotel where the air reeked of stale cleaner and microwavable meals.

“Miss me that bad?” she said at last, gently.

“I’m out of practice.”

“Where’s your head at, Will?”

“You don’t want to know,” he said quietly. He stared up at the ceiling and rubbed the eye that was wrong, all wrong.

“Is there something I can say to make it better?”

“Still two blue?” he rasped.

“Still two blue,” she assured him with a laugh. In the background, the chatter shifted to commercials, and she muted it. “And you?”

“Still two blue,” he lied. “Molly, I…”

“Yes?” she pressed when he didn’t continue.

“My Molly,” he murmured. “What did I ever do to deserve you?”

“Get some sleep, dear,” she urged him, and he sighed in relief at the caring tone she took. “Try and get some sleep.”

-

In his dreams, there was a fire that burned, that seared. It touched his skin, consumed him, but he marveled at it rather than fight it, the steady thrum of a heart that beat in time with his, made the world move at a little slower pace.

There was the sensation of peace, of belonging. Of something that just felt *right*.

-

He woke the next morning, not for the first time that day but certainly the last. He stared at his face in the mirror, at the shadows just under his eyes and the way the hideous, marred color of old blood accented his lack of rest. He considered ripping the eye out, much like the ‘Soul Stealer’ did.

One eye blue, the other maroon.

He called Dr. Chilton, out of courtesy, and was assured that Hannibal Lecter hadn’t done anything to warrant a loss of privileges like Will questioning him. At the mention of his name, there was a peculiar prickling along the back of his neck, but Will pressed the feeling down. He refused to think on it.

Everything was going to be fine.

Before he left, he mulled over what to do about his one blue eye, one maroon, but ultimately he did nothing. If Hannibal Lecter’s eyes were the same, he’d never have to do a damn thing. He could find this killer, go home, and curl up with Molly on the couch, debating the pros and cons of family feud with one family whose parents were soulmates and the other family whose parents had been built on something a little more substantial than ‘love at first sight’.

Thankfully, Dr. Chilton was with a patient when he arrived, and it was Barney who once again set everything up for him, making no comment on the way Will idly bit his thumb as he followed along. If he noticed, he certainly didn’t care, and Will thought that if everything else fell through, he could just get a job as an orderly working under Barney.

They didn’t bother with partitions this time. Will sat down in the chair and once again found himself staring at Lecter’s back, hands clasped behind him, feet twelve inches apart. A

military stance. Will noted the tense hold of his shoulders, the slight bend of his knees. He'd been standing like that for quite some time. At the thought of him turning around, his heart began to pound.

"Good morning, Dr. Graham," Hannibal said, and he turned.

One eye blue, the other maroon.

There was a myriad of emotions that hit him all at once, and years later Will Graham still wouldn't be able to explain it in a clear, concise manner. First there was shock, an ugly, awful thing that made his bones grow cold, followed by horror. A blunt refusal to believe, then a terrified fear that made his teeth ache.

Underneath it all, there was the sensation of his chest warming, his heart thumping once, twice. A curl of pleasure rolled down his spine, and he found himself standing, wanting to be closer, needing to be closer, needing to-

-**No**.

"No," he whispered, and he was standing at the bars, mere inches from Hannibal, some part of him screaming to run but another part longing to stay. He gaped up at him, breath cutting short, and he shook his head. "No."

"I should say the same," Lecter said quietly, and his clever hands lifted to grip the bars that separated them. "If I wasn't compelled at this very moment to take hold of you."

"Don't touch me," Will growled, and he forced himself to take a step back. His nerves were alive, singing, dancing, urging him to move closer, to reach out and take, touch, hold-

-a fucking murderous psychopath.

"I have no intention of it, Dr. Graham," Hannibal said easily, his eyes marking Will's movements. "Although the moment you stepped into the room, I felt it as I'd felt nothing else in my entire life. It was exhilarating."

"Don't," Will warned. "Don't talk like that."

"Why? Did you not dream of our connection? I did."

"That's not why I'm here."

"Of course it is. You had to come, at the very least to ensure that it was as we said –an outlier. It is not, though. You can see for yourself. Rather, you can *feel* for yourself." He extended a hand lazily, beckoning. Will stared at it, wanting to reach back. Forcing himself not to.

"This isn't happening. This isn't happening to me," Will hissed.

"It is. It's important not to dwell on fantasies, Will." The way his name curled across Hannibal's tongue sent a thrilling shiver down his spine.

“This changes nothing,” he said instead, and he was given a congenial nod.

“If you like. I was interested before, from your promise ring to your two blue eyes and your grief counseling, but this has changed something fundamentally.”

“This changes nothing,” he repeated, and maybe if he said it enough times, he’d really believe it. He stumbled over the leg of the chair, and he sunk down into it, pressing his face to his hands.

“This must be your worst fears realized,” Hannibal said when Will didn’t lift his head. “The chemicals within your brain took one look at me, and they saw such a connection between us that they decided to make manifest the ways that we are much the same. No one can ever see us together and not know how right for one another we are. No matter what you do, that isn’t something you can hide anymore with the fanciful, pseudo-happy life you constructed.”

He heard the shuffle of feet, the creak of a chair as Hannibal Lecter sat down as well. Between them, the silence ticked away at the time kept on Will’s watch. He rubbed his face, lowered his hands and stared at Hannibal’s leg, a sudden urge to weep coming over him.

Molly was never going to forgive him.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, I was honestly not expecting the absolutely amazing feedback!! You guys are so awesome!! This Will Graham/Lecter is honestly going to be a bit of a blend of the NBC Hannibal characters with some of the grit of the books if you can't tell. It's a little bit different from my other stuff, so I hope that you guys enjoy!

One Brown, One Hazel

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 3:

"I'm overcome with the urge to change the subject, since I can see how much our conversation is causing you discomfort. On the other hand, my curiosity is peaked, and there isn't much to entertain in the prison syndicate these days. Is this normal, Dr. Graham?"

Will rubbed his face with his hands, trying to bring his breathing back down to a manageable state. He'd done this before –answered questions to criminals about the confusing and tumultuous train of thought that it was to have a soulmate while handling their own warped psyche. He'd worked with clients whose soulmates were in prison for horrendous acts of violence, for those whose soulmates suffered from alcoholism and drug addiction. Grief counseling wasn't just for those whose soulmate had died, but for every other sticky situation in between.

"Yes." He inhaled, held his breath and exhaled sharply, pushing out all of the negative thoughts in his head. It didn't work, but at least he tried. Compartmentalize, compartmentalize, *compartmentalize.*

"If you like, you could walk me through just what this is that's happening. Some of my work did correspond with soulmates, but nowhere near as detailed as your studies, from what I've read. You've sat in on court cases for soulmates, your knowledge covetous for prosecutors and defense attorneys alike."

God, was he trying to find a middle ground? Needle under his skin to get deeper into his head, but also comfort him with the facts of the matter rather than his own horror in experiencing it? Will wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry at the thought, of Hannibal Lecter of all people trying to help him come to terms with his own personal hell.

"The first few days are going to take time getting used to," he said at last, dragging his thumb over his bottom lip. "You dream as they dream."

"Whose dream wins out? How is that determined?"

"It's not entirely conclusive, since sleep studies aren't entirely conclusive, but the dreams with the most…vivid imagery tend to take root first."

"I wonder what we will see," Lecter said with a small, delighted smile. Will shuddered.

"Uhm…you can expect to get small, sporadic flashes of emotion if they are felt in extremity, and pain is another linked association. If either one of us came to harm, the other would know it."

“That fades, though?”

“For the most part.” Will glanced up to the edge of the table and swallowed convulsively. “There are soulmates that report still feeling pains of severity if their partner is hurt enough. From those studies, the soulmates reported having a strong bond emotionally, physically, as well as the simple connection of the eye color.”

“Are you saying that to reassure me that the only bond we will ever have is the eye color, Dr. Graham?”

More to reassure myself, he thought savagely.

“You’re going to want to touch.”

“I do,” Lecter agreed amiably. Rather than seem repulsed by the thought of such a connection, he seemed almost overjoyed.

“It is a conscious thought to get over that,” Will continued pointedly. He drummed his fingers to get rid of the urge himself. He longed to find out just how warm Lecter’s skin was to the touch. “This isn’t something that encompasses every aspect of yourself. Soulmates don’t consume. It is an added layer of connection to the people around us, a chemical reaction to the base instincts of human nature to connect, grow, and further mankind.”

“Your DNA wanted to connect to mine,” Hannibal said.

“Irrelevant,” Will dismissed with a short wave of his hand. Very relevant, but he wouldn’t entertain the thought. “No matter the DNA, no matter the chemical reaction, we are not victims of our circumstance. Your…forced regard for me isn’t going to change the things you do, although you may feel the need to take it into consideration. As we’ve seen with soulmate violence, a person can still pull the trigger on their soulmate if they are feeling emotional enough.”

“Are you saying that to warn me of your intentions, or are you reassuring me of my capacity to one day kill you?”

Will didn’t rise to the bait. He thought of the nurse with no tongue and one eye, and he grimly looked to the drawings just over Hannibal’s head.

“The aftermath of those actions, though, is traumatic. You don’t feel empathy, Dr. Lecter-”

“-Please, just Hannibal-”

“-but you will most certainly feel something much like that if you harmed me. My pain would become your pain.”

He looked at Hannibal’s chin, and his breath caught. He wondered what his skin would taste like on his lips, the kind of noises he’d make when he-

-NO.

“I wonder at your empathy disorder; if I would surely feel the sting of harming you on an emotional level, what would it do to you to raise your hand to me in violence?”

Will wet his lips and looked towards the file that sat just on the table, so close but so far. “We’re not going to find out. As long as you’re locked up, I won’t feel compelled to put a bullet in you.”

“Saving your mental constitution for another day of crime fighting,” he said, and Will looked down to his worn shoes. “I once had a patient that could hear the thoughts of their soulmate. How real was their reality?” Lecter wondered.

“That is…very rare,” Will said haggardly. “And there aren’t enough studies to conclude as to whether or not it was merely the emotional bond that allowed the soulmates to *believe* they could hear one another’s thoughts because of the amount of contact they had. Best friends can boast conversations where they finished one another’s sentences.”

“I wonder what you would say if you could hear my thoughts, Dr. Graham,” Hannibal said evenly.

Will blanched. He didn’t want to know the sordid things that happened in Hannibal Lecter’s mind, let alone his reaction to it. He wasn’t sure if he’d be revolted or comforted by them. Probably both. “Do you have other questions for me, Dr. Lecter?”

He hoped fervently that he didn’t.

“I’m intrigued by this. These three years for me in this cell have been dull, nothing to whet my mind with. How troublesome is the distance?”

“Troublesome. Not impossible.”

“Is it as burning as the desire to touch?”

“The closer the soulmate is, the far more comfort and ease you’ll feel. We have active duty military personnel that fight overseas without their soulmate, though, so it is the same as the emotional urges –not an all-consuming need. You can consciously decide to not let it bother you.” A bit of a lie, but he wasn’t going to say that.

“Yes, but those overseas can only do so after a grueling psychiatric evaluation, yes?”

“…Yes,” Will said slowly. “That is why the military is far more comfortable with pairs within the same squad. They’re less likely to defect because their partner is closeby at all times.” He rubbed his eyes –mostly the bad one. Definitely just rubbed the bad one.

“Am I tiring you?” Hannibal queried. It was a trick question, one he didn’t want to entertain.

“It’s fine.”

“Did you see the house, Will?”

Will noticed his switching between his title and his first name, an effort to throw him off-balance with the changing between familiarity and professionalism. He also noted the change of subject, and he knew without knowing that some part of his discomfort had reached Hannibal, enough that Hannibal didn't want to trouble himself with the feeling anymore. The idea of him caring about Will's emotions made bile burn in the back of his throat. He checked his breathing and drummed his fingers on his leg.

"Yes."

"There were no pictures of the backyard. I thought it curious, since there were detailed pictures of every corner of the house, but nothing of the backyard."

"It was large."

"A privacy fence that wrapped around, too?" Lecter prompted.

"Yes." A beat as Will pressed his palm flat on his leg to stop the tapping. "Do you think he chooses that on purpose?"

"Not only do I think it, but so do you," he replied. "I could feel the spark of gratification from you as I said it."

Will ignored the jab. "He goes outside at some point. To breathe, to…look around."

"His timing seems to correspond to the moon. If I felt such an affinity, I'd want to look at it while I painted my masterpiece."

"Masterpiece," Will repeated.

"You thought so, too. He held the mirror over the 'other' eye as he stimulated himself with her corpse. When finished, he took the shard and placed it over her eye, violently removing the one that didn't belong. That changeover –he wanted to see how close it would feel to the real thing, yes?"

Will had noticed it, too. A fragment of mirror just at the corner of the mutilated eye hole, a small piece from a shattered part. "After, looking down at her, he didn't want to see her judgement of him. He covered her eye so that he could see his own in triumph."

"He imagines what it'd be to have a soulmate, so his conjecture is that she would not approve of what was done," Hannibal mused. "Can a soulmate be sexually assaulted, Dr. Graham? Or is their own desire of touch sustaining enough that in the moment, they *want* the contact?"

"As I said, it is not an all-consuming thing," Will ground out. He decided to ignore the hungry look Hannibal was giving him, the hum of pleasure coiling in his guts. "The feelings evoked does not overtake reason and logic. They very much can decide that no matter the chemical reaction in their mind, they don't want the contact."

"Then he covers her eye in shame," Lecter concluded.

“You would know that, though,” Will pointed out. “You first informed Chilton of your knowledge of this person. You know better than most this man’s train of thought.”

“As do you, I’d imagine. You went to the house, didn’t you? You had to get a taste of the killer, slide into his shoes and his mind. How did it feel, Will?” He switched names, leaning forward slightly. Will wondered if the turn of his head came from his time being locked away, or if he always appeared so animalistic. “How did it feel to walk into the room and imagine yourself as the man that made the walls bleed?”

“You would know,” Will repeated quietly. He glanced up to Hannibal’s eyes, stared at the one that belonged to him. Pleasure hummed under his skin as a violent thread of disgust crawled down the knobs of his spine.

“I do now,” Hannibal agreed. “You are horrified at your ability to see such violence and understand. You marvel at how easy it would be for you to participate in it. You revel in the feeling of power. Shocked at your associations, no barriers within your mind for the things you love.”

“Are you going to be of help in this investigation, Dr. Lecter, or are you not?” Will demanded, skin darkening. He hadn’t expected Hannibal to feel so far in, to see so much. “Tell me now so that I don’t waste my time. People are in danger-”

“-And you have a weakness for the kicked dog,” Hannibal said smoothly. “As I told Dr. Chilton, I know the man you’re looking for. He was a patient of mine, some years ago.”

Finally. Will resisted the urge to inch closer, trying to dampen the feeling of eagerness in his blood. “You treated him, then.”

“Ah, now I have your undivided attention,” Hannibal remarked. He tapped himself on the chest once, twice. “I can feel it here. You’re excited, Dr. Graham.”

“…Yes.”

“If you let me touch you, I will continue.”

“What?” Will snapped, jerking back.

“As I said: if you let me touch you, I will continue.”

Will glared at him, first at his chest, then his shoulder. His fingers curled into fists on his knees, and he exhaled slowly. “No.”

“You’re going to try and keep us a secret, aren’t you, Dr. Graham?” His eyebrow quirked, and a smirk graced his lips. “Yes, I can see just how well that would be –colored contacts, a fringe across your eye, an eyepatch when you’re confidant that you can fake an injury. You’ll claim it was only a singular connection, and with your degrees and your career, your *spotless* career, they will believe you.

“But what happens when I refute that? Just what are the laws that bind you and I, the things that allow our presence around one another, the things that hinder us? Would Jack

Crawford pull you from the case, ashamed? Would your partner, two eyes exactly the same color, shy from you once they knew? You are content to be quiet, but there is no guarantee that I will remain so."

"I don't want your hands on me," Will said plaintively.

"I will not be grotesque." Lecter stood, and he all but swayed towards the bars, stopping an inch from them. Will felt his gaze like a brand, and he pointedly stared down at his shoes. "Just your hand. Just your palm to mine, and I will tell you what you want to know so badly."

Will stared at Lecter's shoes, those damned hideous hospital-issued shoes, and he swallowed with difficulty. He stood, and he was all too aware of the number of steps between them, the scent of off-brand soap that radiated from him. He shouldn't know those things, shouldn't be able to smell those things –he tried to comfort himself with the knowledge of what he'd told Hannibal, how those things faded with time. Conditioning and practice were the keys, and as a doctor he had every single one of those keys at the ready to use to lock doors no one else wanted to when they found their soulmate.

Why did his heart pound so furiously, then?

"This is purely chemical, you know," he said, and he coughed to dispel the pressure on his jaw. He walked closer, paused just on the other side of the bars. He stared at the seam for the elastic band settled just on Hannibal's waist.

"So is love. So is anger, and so is pain, Will," Lecter murmured. He held his hand out, palm up. "It doesn't lessen its importance."

Will grimaced, and he slowly, hesitantly placed his hand in Hannibal's.

It felt *right*.

He trembled at the sensation through him, the essence of completion, of peace. Hannibal's palm was warm against his, and he interlaced their fingers, gripping with a tenderness that borderlined on romantic. Will looked up to his eyes, one maroon and one blue, and he closed his tightly, not wanting to see, not wanting to *see*. The feeling of pleasure coursed through him, Hannibal's own reaction a drowning man breaking the surface for his first breath of air. It made his knees weak, even as he wanted to weep.

"Beautiful," Hannibal murmured.

"Who was your patient, Dr. Lecter?" Will forced himself to ask. He wanted to touch. He wanted to *touch*.

"Hannibal, Will," he reminded him.

"Hannibal, who was your patient?"

"I will give you a clue, and do with it what you like. You will find the information through my old patient files, burrowed deep in the evidence lockers of the FBI, I imagine.

Look for the ones whose eyes matched too well, and you'll see what you need to see."

"That's not a name, Hannibal."

"And this is not the only touching I want to do," Hannibal replied. His voice was venom, a serpent's song. "But for both of us, this will have to suffice."

He let go of him, and Will fell against the bars, his arm falling to his side uselessly. Hannibal strolled to the table, and he returned the case file, fingertips grazing Will's as he smiled, ruthless, cold.

"I feel you in my skin, Will," he said darkly. "Run along before I taste you on my tongue."

Will held the case file tight to his chest, and he found himself once again fleeing maximum security.

-

He forced himself to walk through a park, hands crammed into his pockets. He stared up at the sky; he stared at the ground below. He worked on breathing, on counting back from ten, on numbering the many leaves on the branches of a particularly ugly tree, until he felt that he wouldn't find his way back to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. The distance, the many doors, the locks between him and Lecter were too many, and his skin starved at the thought of crawling into bed alone.

He thought of Molly, and he found himself decidedly nauseas.

He had to tell Jack. He couldn't do this case, not when he was emotionally invested in the only 'witness' they had to man behind the crimes. It was unethical. It wasn't right. Jack had every right to know, every right to pull him from the case where he'd run crying back to Molly, hugging her close and begging her to forgive him for being so *fucking* weak.

He didn't.

Instead he called one of his colleagues, someone that could help him set his head on straight, someone to help him focus on realities rather than the fact that Hannibal looked rather complete with one blue eye and one maroon.

"Dr. Graham?"

"Dr. Avery," Will greeted, and he sat down on a small knoll, digging the heels of his shoes into the grass. "I hope I'm not interrupting."

"No, just finished with a patient. Can I help you with something?"

Dr. Avery was a psychiatrist he'd met after he'd left consulting for the FBI, someone that worked in the same building as he did with grief patients. Although her eyes were brown and hazel, he found her lack of a living soulmate somehow comforting. She connected with her patients on an emotional level, since during her schooling she'd felt the sudden ripping

sensation of losing her only bond to someone else on the earth. In low lighted areas, it looked like her eyes were the same.

Will learned the story of her loss after he'd met her in lowlights and made a bad joke.

"I'm working with someone on a special case, and I wanted to ask a few questions, get an outsider's perspective."

"Is your bias getting in the way of your work, Dr. Graham?" Dr. Avery asked teasingly.

"…Maybe," he said.

"If you're admitting it, then it must be bad."

"I maintain that I'm not the best doctor when it comes to soulmate therapy," he said, looking up at the sky. It mocked him with its calm, peaceful beauty.

"You're just the most informed, I know; you've said that before, even when I disagree."

"I've got a man working on a case who's come to the realization this morning that the witness to the case is his soulmate," he said.

"I could see you pulling him from the case on those grounds alone," she said. "You of all people, Graham."

"…Yeah."

"I mean, as far as laws go, he's not breaking any. Soulmates just happen. It's chemical, it's visual, and he's not to be blamed for it." A pause. "You're not blaming him for it, are you?"

"Of course not," he lied, rubbing his eyes.

"Because there are laws against that, Graham," she reminded him.

"I'm not blaming him, it's merely…an inconvenience." Among other things. "The witness is in a maximum security prison."

"If you're uncertain, I'd have you recommend someone else for the case. Despite there being no grounds other than bias, it does beg to question whether or not he will be entirely truthful if the inmate reveals something that condemns himself in the process of highlighting someone else's crimes. The laws regarding *that* are still hazy."

"Prop 54: lesser sentencing for a person that lied under oath to protect their soulmate," Will recalled. "It must be nice."

"You know exactly why they lie to protect –survival. Instinct."

“A conscious decision,” Will disagreed kindly.

“On the other hand, I could see you eating this up.”

“I’m not hungry,” he said, frowning.

“You will be, once you get over your disgust at the thought that he’s connected with someone that’s committed an obscene enough crime to be in maximum. I don’t know *how* you think, but I know the things you think.” They both laughed at that, Will’s far more hollow but no less amused. “You could use him, Graham.”

“Use him,” he repeated.

“Come on, get over yourself,” she urged him. “If the inmate isn’t revealing information, who do you think they’ll be more likely to talk to? You, a random cop, or the person they see as the one singular, most important thing in their life now?”

“Oh.”

Oh.

“How long have they been in prison? A year? Many years?”

“A few,” Will admitted.

“Long enough that the taste of real food is probably gone, replaced with that day-to-day gruel that gives enough nutrients to keep them healthy, but they’re hungry enough that they’d still kill for a granola bar.”

“Among other things,” he said, thinking of the way Lecter’s eyes traced his body.

“Right, right,” Avery agreed, and he could hear the excitement in her voice as she broke through to his skull. “I know how cops are –agents, too. They want a case for a reason; they’ll do anything to remain on that case. You can’t punish him for finding his soulmate –I would beg you not to, seeing as how cruel that is –but you could utilize him. If their drive for justice is just as strong as yours, they’ll trick their soulmate.”

“Would they be able to, though? The initial bonds are strong,” he said. For the first time in his life, he could say that with utmost sincerity, seeing as how he most certainly felt them like an iron cage around his chest. He wanted to go see Hannibal again. He firmly decided against it.

“Think, Graham, think past that bias,” she coached.

“…Keep them separated for a week. Let the emotions build, in that time coach him on how to control his emotions and the urges he feels, then when they’re finally able to be together, let the influx of emotion be such that he’s able to manipulate the inmate without their knowledge, due to the buildup confusing and distorting their ability to think rationally.”

“Morally, it’s horrifically grey, but yes,” Avery said –not quite proud, but not condemning.

“It could work,” he said doubtfully.

“We’re psychiatrists, Graham. We help people, soulmates in particular, because there is something within the chemical makeup that requires a finer edge, a little more time and consideration. Just because they have buffers in the law to protect their interests doesn’t mean we have to be entirely kind to those that broke the law, especially in heinous ways.”

“I know,” he said wearily.

“That being said, be as kind to that officer as you are to your patients, Graham. I’ve seen you with them, although at work parties you look like someone dipped shit in the punch bowl. There’s a reason people keep coming back to you. Think of him like a patient. He’s probably scared right now, horrified with himself. He’s a cop? He wonders at his ability to connect to such a person –what does that say about him? Pro-bono, if you’re feeling charitable. The more focused and calm you can keep him, the better luck you’ll have with your work. Work with him to work with the case. Afterwards, he can see someone else to settle the identity crisis he’s probably feeling right now.”

“Thank you,” he said honestly. “I really…needed to hear that.”

“You know all of these things I just told you, Graham, you just needed to hear it outside of your own head so that you could believe it. You’re a good psychiatrist. That’s honestly what that man needs right now.”

Will hung up, and he stared up at the sky above him that dared be beautiful at a time like this. Her words echoed, round and round, and by the time he felt well enough to get up without heading straight back to the institution, they’d curled in on themselves, becoming strong and sustainable with their convictions.

He most certainly didn’t want to *join* Hannibal, but he could definitely try and *use* him.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the time taken to comment/kudo/bookmark! I've loved seeing the curiosity and intrigue into my soulmate alternate universe, and I've been so happy to share. :) I hope you enjoyed!

For the curious, "Gasoline" by Halsey was indeed the inspiration for this story, and I listened to "Left Handed Kisses" by Andrew Bird for this chapter in particular.

Two Toffee Eyes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 4:

When he dreamed, he dreamt of mirrors. They didn't reflect the eyes of the dead, but they reflected his eyes, one blue and one maroon. Every time he lifted his hand to break the mirror, to destroy the side that showed the worst of him, another would appear, then another.

Each time he fell to his knees, head cradled in hands stained with blood, something warm caressed him, embraced him against the bite of the cold. That stark relief should have kept the worst at bay, but it didn't. Each time he felt its presence, he hated himself a little bit more.

-

He woke up thinking of Hannibal. He paced his room, considered calling Chilton, considered against it. Dr. Avery was right –*he* was right. He had to wait this out, wait until the frenzy of endorphins just under his skin abated, let it ride until Hannibal was pacing the cell with the lack of contact, the lack of information to combat the rush whenever he thought of him. He was used to worse thoughts in his head than longing for the touch of someone; he could do this.

He could do this.

Molly was at work when he called, and he took a long shower, head pressed against the tile, water droplets making his eyes squint shut. He needed to call Crawford. He needed to look through the files at Quantico. He needed to see Hannibal.

"Got anything?" Jack asked. Will drummed fingers on the small desk in the hotel, teeth furiously chewing his bottom lip.

"He's given me a goose chase."

"We expected that," Jack replied heavily.

"I think if I look at his patient files, that's where the man is. I just need to see them."

"Price and Zeller got back to me. Price is pissed because they didn't want to give the bodies up at the funeral home –you know that was the day of their funeral, right?"

Will thought to feel guilty, but he didn't. If the funeral director was pissed because they mussed up the eyes he'd wanted to glue shut, he'd get over it when they kept the killer from finding his wife home alone at night. The savage thought didn't sit well with him, and he grimaced. He rubbed his maroon eye. He thought to blame Hannibal for the intrusive thought, but he didn't.

"Anything?"

"You were right, Will. He touched the eye."

"Bastard couldn't help himself," Will said. "The feet?"

"Some smudges, but nothing was good enough for more than a partial."

Partials were fine. They didn't help, but they didn't hurt. He paced the room, and in the lowest part of his stomach, he felt a mild churning of longing. He pressed his hand to his gut and compressed, gritting his teeth. Lecter wanted to see him. He didn't want to see Lecter –a lie. He did, but that wasn't the point.

"We got a partial, though."

"And you were right," Jack said. Underneath his low-leveled tone, there was praise. "You're back in the game, just when I needed you to be."

"I'm going to swing by HQ and get a look at those records. If I can find some kind of clue, I think Lecter will give me a bone."

"A *bone*?"

"He appreciates tenacity, doesn't he? When Alana Bloom first discovered his drawings of the murders, her bold-faced lie to him was so well done he let her live rather than kill her for it. He asked her to be blind."

"And now he's rotting in a cell for it."

"He sends her cards at Christmas," Will tacked on. Talking about him made his spit turn to rust. Made his skin tingle. He wanted to say more, but he held back. He wanted to keep talking about him, but that was a side-effect –-a *side-effect.*

"Well, I'll let them know to let you in, get you a temporary pass. I'm doing house-to-house visits again, but you know how well those go."

"Keeps your feet moving," Will said, walking out of the hotel room. He needed to keep his feet moving. He needed to think about something other than the way Hannibal's hand felt like home, how just the small contact made him wake in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. He wondered how Molly was doing at work with her two blue eyes.

He grabbed a pair of sunglasses on the way, just because. When he got to HQ, no one questioned them, although when he got to the basement and was given thirteen boxes of files, the agent squinted at him with extreme prejudice. They weren't pretty sunglasses.

"*Please* tell me you're hungover and not trying to rock a 90's fashion statement," a voice said behind him.

"Don't tell Crawford," he said, and he smiled a little.

“You come back to consult on a case, and he’s already got you drinking,” Beverly said, circling the desks to face him head on. Time hadn’t aged her, other than the fine lines around her mouth from laughter. She had one black eye and one blue, as well as the grief around her forehead that attested to where the other blue ended up. He’d given her grief counseling many times before he realized he had a knack for it, before he ultimately left the FBI.

“Just getting into the head of the killer,” he cracked.

“The killer’s a drinker?”

“Yes.” That wasn’t a lie. Will thought he and the killer had that in common, as well as a burning aversion towards soulmates. He didn’t say that part, though.

“So your form of retribution is, what –lurk in the evidence lockers of the FBI?”

“Lecter claims to know of the man who is doing this, but he’s not being entirely helpful. He said the man is in the files where the eyes match too well.”

“He was a doctor before they made soulmate eye color matching mandatory to track in therapy. I wonder why he did it then,” she said, grabbing one of the boxes. Her stark look sent the evidence jockey scuttling away, and she plopped down onto a chair, opening the cardboard top.

“If the way he gets into anyone’s head is true, he’d want to detail every aspect of that person while working them over in therapy,” Will said.

“’If the way’? You met him, Will. How was it?” Beverly looked up from the mildly abused box and titled her head.

“Going to help me do some grunt work?” he asked rather than answer. Even with his stupid sunglasses on, he couldn’t look towards her face. Fingers fumbled with the cardboard top to an evidence box, and a murmur of shame made his ears hot. Beverly smiled sympathetically and let the question drop.

“After I compiled all of my stuff, I’ve got a free afternoon, and a soft spot for an alcoholic, so you’re in luck.” A beat. “Still an alcoholic?”

“Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic,” he said gravely. “Three years sober since before yesterday.”

A whistle, low and thankfully without pity.

“Jack’s going to fuck you up by the end of this,” she said. “I hope Molly knows what’s waiting for her when you go back.”

It was necessary for them to think he was off the bandwagon, he told himself. It wasn’t entirely a lie. When he was getting ready that morning, the small bar in his room was almost too much for him to handle, too close to a thought that the only way he’d claw

Hannibal out of his head was to drown him. His stomach clenched again, pained. Hannibal needed to see him.

March 13th, 2012

Patient: Francine Coherty (S, one black, one brown)

Francine's struggles with her soulmate, Derrick York, stem primarily from a previous soulmate of his that passed. His previous soulmate died when he was fourteen years of age, and according to her, no matter how close she feels her bond to him, he cannot reciprocate in the same way. Anxiety medication not aiding in attacks, considering changing dosage. Depression medication aiding with serotonin levels.

Will stopped reading and moved onto the next file –Francine Coherty met her end by the hand of Hannibal Lecter towards the end of his killing sprees. Her ears he'd placed in a phone booth, the rest of her seated outside at the bus stop. When questioned at the trial, he remarked that her troubles with her soulmate stemmed from listening far too much to what other people said. She was always waiting for something more rather than reveling in her experience.

June 29th, 2012

Patient: Francis Dolarhyde (S, brown, brown)

Struggle with alternate personality, improvement upon adjusted medication. Perceived lisp and struggle with consonants, although under the medication there is improvement, leading to conclusion of psychosomatic speech impediment, remnants from childhood. No eye contact, common with disorder.

Suspected neglect from biological parents leading to ward of state standing until 18. Will not speak of early childhood, mentions fascination with filmography. Longs for soulmate, eloquence waxing while under medication, otherwise flinches from discussion.

They went on much the same; Will separated soulmates from non-soulmates, and within each category he further separated the disillusioned from the depressed, the personality disorders from the chemically imbalanced. Thirteen boxes of patient notes, and by early afternoon he found himself staring at seven distinct piles of files, fingers twitching with the need to further analyze, to further ingest. If he kept himself busy, he wouldn't focus on the cramping in his stomach, the intrusive thought that if Hannibal starved to death all would be absolutely lost.

By 3:00 P.M., Beverly excused herself for lunch. She returned in an hour with an egg salad for him, which he devoured as he studied the files, feet propped up and fingers tapping incessantly on the table beside him. The sunglasses stayed on.

There had to be something in the files. Hannibal's hunger strayed towards the primal, and he thought how delicious it'd be to run his fingertips over the most sensitive parts of his skin, mapping out each place that only the smallest number of people had possibly seen. Trent Hawthorne struggled with bi-polar disorder, and he had no soulmate. Hannibal's

muscles ached, as if he'd just been exercising. Trent Hawthorne was institutionalized after he couldn't quite come to terms with his psychiatrist eating people. Hannibal wanted to see what it'd feel like to bite his lips. Trent Hawthorne-

-He tossed the file onto the table with a disgusted noise, scraping his fingers over his eyes and knocking his sunglasses askew. He looked to the clock on the computer beside him, scowling at the numbers, then staring at them blankly. 8:00 P.M. He looked about, but no Beverly. She must have left at a normal time, his lack of acknowledgement to her goodbye enough for her to leave him to his devices. With no one around, he removed his ridiculous sunglasses and sighed, burying his face in his hands. He'd gotten somewhere, but it wasn't anywhere fast enough. He needed another distraction.

He excused himself from the HQ and returned to the hotel, utilizing the gym on hand to run off the miles in his blood, the yearning to cross town and press himself against the metal bars enough to make his feet pound harder, his arms pump faster. By the end of it, he paused beside the treadmill, hands on his knees as he panted, face red and lungs ballooning. Grief counselors weren't athletic, at least; the kind of grief counselors like Will Graham weren't. Used to be. Should have continued, even after the FBI. Could've, should've, would've.

Beside him, finishing a rousing round of stair stepping, a woman hopped down and crossed to the water dispenser in the corner. He felt her eye him, and he looked to the ground, leaning down to retie his shoe.

When he straightened, she stood just in front of him, face flushed but pleased, cup held out to him. Out of the periphery of her shoulder where a small freckle lay, he noted two solid brown eyes, charming as hard toffee candies. When she saw his mismatched eyes, her expression deflated, but only somewhat.

"Don't push yourself too hard," she said kindly, and he accepted the water with a curt jerk of his head.

"Thanks," he replied. He gestured with the cup and took a sip, keen on the smell of sweat and dashed hopes.

Everyone, from the five-year-old to the fifty-year-old, waited with bated breath to meet their 'other half'. Poor, foolish woman probably felt she found hers at 9:00 P.M. at a hotel in Baltimore. Maybe she'd dream of him, hoping to wake with the most fundamental change of her life. Maybe she wondered if she'd gain a seafoam blue eye or a dour maroon one. She'd stare before the mirror, tilt her head this way and that –had he not met her gaze? No, no, he hadn't; that could have been her soulmate, but the fool only took her water, not her eyes.

Why had he taken Hannibal's eye?

He called Molly, lying in bed with damp hair and pajama pants, hand pressed to his bad eye like he could somehow get used to the idea of life with only one. He wondered if he was going to lie to her again. He wondered if the 'Soul Stealer' was also lying in bed, eye

covered like he could imagine someone seeing into him the way he so desperately desired. That's what he wanted, wasn't it? He wanted to be seen?

Lucky for him, Will was trying oh-so hard to see him.

"You were right," Molly said by way of greeting.

"I usually am, but people are normally less pleased about it than you sound." God, her voice was a balm.

"She gave a two weeks, then she mentioned how his family's from Belize. Why isn't your family from Belize?"

"I'll get back to you on that," said Will, sitting up. On the bedside table, the file from the first murder rested, teasing. He thought about touching it, but he didn't want it to spread to Molly that way. He had the urge to wash his hands. He had the urge to go see Hannibal.

"Can you imagine?" she wondered with a laugh. "Less than a week and she's tossing it all because something just 'feels right'. Can you imagine, Will?"

"I'm trying to," he said. "It's my job to."

"I guess that's why Jack took you away from me, isn't it? Soulmates steal your eye, keep it for themselves. You have a criminal mind."

"I don't," he said, sharp. He spit the words from his lips, distancing himself from the file on the end table, crossing the room to look out of the window. "I don't have a criminal mind."

She didn't speak for a moment, testing the waters by the cadence of his breathing. He took a breath, exhaled, then pressed his forehead to the glass, staring at the lights of the skylines in the distance, marking each new block with a blink of his heavy eyelids.

"You don't," she said when his breathing resumed to normal.

"I'm sorry."

"What's he going to do to you next?"

"…I didn't see enough here, so I'm going to Minnesota next."

"Minnesota," she mused. "Is that where-"

"A different part," he interjected, sitting down on the chair by the television stand. The lamp poised just over it would be good for late reading, for bashing in the skull of an intruder. He pulled a knee to his chest and idly chewed on a nail. Soul Stealer wouldn't like having to be innovative, but if he had to, he'd use a lamp.

"…Get some sleep, Will," she chided gently.

“My Molly,” he murmured, and his eyes closed. “I’m sorry.”

She forgave him for snapping, for faulting her for his criminal mind. He was apologizing for more than that, though, for more than the fact that he couldn’t reconcile his ability to see violence in its darkest forms. When he hung up, he curled up in the chair with its faded square arms and deep cushion, and he fell asleep there, chanting *I’m sorry, I’m sorry* over and over in his head until the words seemed like more than they were. A prayer, a mantra to see him through the haze that told him he needed to go and see Hannibal.

-

He dreamt of mirrors, of hands curled over the shards, unheeding of the way they cut and drew blood. He stood before one and placed it over his bad eye. When it continued to fall, though, he pried his eye from his skull, offering it to a waiting palm that promised to protect it.

-

Hannibal woke him with a gnawing in his gut. He found himself halfway to the institution for the criminally insane before he went to a screeching halt at a red light and turned around, cursing. When he got back to the hotel lobby, the girl from the gym stood at the front to check out. Two toffee eyes focused on the check she signed, then focused on the desk man that stared back unabashedly. Will absently wondered if she’d leave her number, just in case.

He couldn’t check out of the hotel fast enough, and it was only the sensation of getting through TSA and sitting with his back to a wall at the right terminal that made him feel sure of himself. It was true that he felt rather close to doing something rash, but it would cause more of a scene to do that than to just sit still and get on the plane to Minnesota. The idea of everyone witnessing his breaking down and rushing to see Hannibal Lecter kept him in check.

He was even more relieved when the person occupying the seat beside him was a three-year-old with a gamepad and no illusions of friendship on a plane.

Her one blue eye, one green eye troubled him, and he stared straight ahead. Superstitions about finding the soulmate too young left a lifetime of disappointment, since it was believed that the earlier you found them, the earlier they died. Many of his clients back home had such tales of car wrecks and leukemia, and there weren’t enough statistics in the world for him to convince them that correlation was not causation. For the child’s sake, he hoped it panned out. For their sake, he hoped it was a platonic soulmate. Parents were quick to romanticize children's affection for one another -Will wasn't a fan of most parents.

On the takeoff, his heart burned, his chest fire. At first, there was a dizzying sensation, and he wondered if it was a heart attack –a beat later, he managed to exhale and released the grip on his chest, hands shakily finding an arm rest to hold instead. A mildly panicked, concerned pang slithered through his guts and told him Hannibal felt it, too. It was fine. It was the first week of his ‘bonding’, and his body was warning him that he was getting too far away from what it wanted. It wanted to touch. It wanted to *connect*.

Like a drug, he wanted to detox it cold turkey.

"First time flying from your soulmate?" the woman beside the child asked kindly.

"…Yes," he managed. She wore stretchy pants and slip-on shoes. One blue eye, one grey.

"It's always difficult, isn't it? They make you feel so…whole. The first time, I cried," she confessed. Her hair was twisted into a messy bun, and her top was a zip-up with a white tee under it.

"You're…used to traveling," he noted, angry at how hoarse he sounded. A rage, indignation coupled with unease filtered through his veins, and he had to remind himself with each heartbeat that those were remnants of Hannibal, not *him*.

"Is it that obvious?" she asked with a laugh. Unashamed. Proud of her soulmate, her other half. "Felt like your heart was getting ripped out, right?"

After a beat, incredulous at the invasion of his privacy, scared in the face of the feeling of his heart being strangled, Will managed a nod.

"It'll pass. It takes a few times, but the trip back is always the best feeling in the world. Is it new?"

Another beat. Will swallowed convulsively and nodded.

"Poor thing. You know, I said to my friend, I told her 'it'd be easier to just avoid eyes on trips, even if it meant delaying finding your one and only for a little while. Long distance relationships are hard, just hard, and even though there are tax deductibles for soulmates having to travel for their partner, it just doesn't fix that broken feeling.' Am I right? Is it a long distance relationship?"

"Very long," he managed.

"Oh, dear…do you have to be away for long? When are you going to see them again?"

"I don't know," he said honestly, and he looked down to his hands, palms clammy on the arm rests.

"My darling here, my Evie, her soulmate is her best friend, just the best little friend, and on travels it got to the point she'd scream and scream, so her doctor gave her medication to make it easier, didn't he, sweetie?" The woman finger-combed her daughter's hair, and Evie didn't look up from the game she held between her short, pudgy hands.

"The medication numbs the feeling?" he asked.

"Oooh yes, but I wouldn't recommend it for you. It's more for children because they're not capable of processing the emotions like we do. Insurance covers it, but you pay

out of pocket if you're an adult. Like I say every time I have to say goodbye to mine, though: this too shall pass."

Will nodded because he didn't know what to say to that.

"What I do is I list all of the things I like about them. Then I think of the things that I have that are same as those, and I remind myself that because I have those qualities too, they're here with me now."

Will didn't find it prudent to inform her that the things he had in common with Hannibal Lecter weren't the sort of things to comfort him in the absence of such a person as that. "You've read books on this," he said instead. Much better. Alana would have been proud.

"Yes, just some self-help books really, but there are doctors for this, you know? If you need, I think they have free group sessions, support groups for long distance; they have blogs online, videos –they call those vlogs, I'm told. The important thing is that you know it's not the 'end-all', right? You're feeling these things, but they don't have to change your thoughts."

Will wanted to laugh. He fought very hard to keep the impulse locked away.

"You have to travel for your soulmate a lot," he said, and out of the corner of his eye, he noticed her quick, nervous hands. She was saying this to him as a comfort for herself as much as she tried to sooth away his stranglehold on the armrests.

"Two years strong, and we're going to work out the details for the final move. Things just…need to be *right* with her. That's why we have them, right? That's why we have soulmates."

Will could imagine the long trips, a child in tow that didn't understand. Adoption? In vitro? A child from a person before the time they met the gaze of someone that their DNA decided to bond with? He thought of Molly and her two beautiful blue eyes and gritted his teeth.

"Thanks," he found himself saying. "Thank you."

"Are they cute?" she pressed. "I'm sorry, is that so nosy of me? I just haven't seen a green soulmate in so long! It's such a fresh experience, isn't it? Even with the struggles ahead, you just…you feel *right*, don't you? You don't have to be alone because they'll always be there. Almost makes me wish I didn't have mine, just so I could experience the feeling all over again when I met her again the next day."

To say he smiled would be a lie, but it was somewhat more than a grimace. He shifted in his seat, counted the broken threads on the seat ahead of him, and managed a, "right," before he looked out of the window. He felt Hannibal's discontent, the pain like the after burn of a bad cat scratch along every inch of his skin. It hurt. The farther they flew, the worse it burned.

Chapter End Notes

Song inspiration for this chapter was "Youth" by Daughter

Thank you so much for enjoying this! Someone on tumblr made an image of Will's and Hannibal's eyes swapped, and I literally couldn't stop smiling all day! You guys are so amazing :)

Two Green Eyes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 5:

There was nothing at the first house for him.

The screams had been painted under two new layers of eggshell white. The fear in the shards of mirrors had been discarded for new, shatter-proof mirrors that boasted a money back guarantee. The carpet, once a thick, plush white, was taupe with short, sparse material. Will paced back and forth across the spot she'd been laid to rest, but even when he lined the photos along walls corresponding to the shots taken, there was nothing. He folded himself cross-legged and stared for a long time, imagining how wonderful it'd be to see Hannibal again.

He reminded himself of the man whose tongue was found in the pages of a bible, and that helped squelch the urge down nicely.

He met with the police who gave their full cooperation, their hands so frazzled at the incident that they didn't mind admitting they were in over their heads. As he perused statements, looking for something, *anything*, the chief looked over his shoulder, moustache twitching. They sweated under a broken air conditioner, the walls encasing the stench of too many bodies. He had two solid green eyes, no distinction between them. Will envied them.

"He's gotta be staking them out, right?" Chief Bradshaw asked. "He's not just swinging into a house and hitting at random, the guy had to *know*."

"He had to have vantage points, or some way of accessing the layout for that," Will said.

"He could have," Bradshaw pointed out.

"He could have," Will agreed. He tapped on the photo of the back door, avoiding the cursory stares of other officers going about their business. Their looks made his skin crawl. "Did you look at plumbers, electricians, meter readers, house party sellers like 'It Works' or 'Soulmate Spas'?"

"The late wife did a Pure Romance party, but that's it. Maybe a meter reader could have, but no cameras around to pick up on that." A beat. "They had a dog but it disappeared earlier that day."

"The dog's dead," Will said.

"The dog's dead?"

“That’s a first alarm, a dog. The dog disappeared, Mrs. Panter is murdered. The dog’s dead.”

A slow, uncertain nod. A pause as Bradshaw wiped sweat from his brow. “Maybe the dog was just…run off?”

“He’d want it dead,” Will said impatiently. Then, throwing him a bone, “You could try and find him in house to house sweeps?”

“We beat the track, but no one could get anything of worth. Mostly a lot of questions about how we’re gonna keep the neighborhood safe for soulmates, now that he’s got two of them.” Chief Bradshaw wiped his hand on his pant leg, cursed the heat. “Like people aren’t scared enough.”

“What’d you say to that?”

“We want to keep it safe for all civilians, not just soulmates.”

Will snorted in appreciation, and Bradshaw misunderstood it.

“Look, I see you’ve got your eyes and your connection, but I’ve got a wife and three kids with none of that, and I want them just as safe as soulmates. We figure, we find our ‘soulmate’ then they’ll just have to deal with what we have that’s real, valid, and built on years of love and trust.” He puffed his chest a little, prepared for the argument Will was certain many a person had spouted off to him:

You don’t know until you feel it.

It’s the most invigorating thing in the world.

If they love you, they’ll understand that you’re meant for your soulmate, not them.

Why bother dating them if they’re not your soulmate?

“I’m going to do a walk-around, get to know the area. The house has nothing for me,” he said.

“That your way of disagreeing with me, Dr. Graham?”

“Did it sound disagreeable?”

“Was it?”

Will studied the edge of his collared shirt. “It sounds like you’ve got a wife, kids, and two green eyes,” Will said. He was sweltering under the broken air conditioner. It dripped water in a brown pile on the floor, and he tracked the movement. “That’s real, and it’s yours.”

Bradshaw wasn’t ready for his complacency. He chewed around his words, like he wasn’t sure what to do now that he couldn’t spit them. His shoulders relaxed, and he said, “thank you.”

-

The comic book shop down the road from the house was ugly, and kids kicked pine cones around the parking lot. Will lingered just outside, watching them, and they refused to scatter under his scrutiny. Had the Soul Stealer also lurked here, waiting? Did he watch the kids and lust, hunger, desire? No, no; his thirst wasn't for children. It was for a relationship, adults, females specifically whose eyes changed when he thought they should have waited for him to change them. A woman walked out of the shop, and Will watched her focus on not watching him –two shades of blue that didn't quite match. The Soul Stealer would have liked her feet. What else would he have liked? Will wasn't sure –that's what he was trying to find out.

How are you choosing them, you son-of-a-bitch?

At that thought, he shook his head and entered the store, relieved at the working air conditioner there. He scuffed his shoe on the linoleum and looked around, pausing between the Dungeons & Dragons manuals and the cosplay section, lingering on a small case of makeup props.

"Looking for something?" a short, squat woman asked. Two hazel eyes.

"Colored contacts," he said, and the woman nodded, gesturing further down towards a more specialty area.

"What are you thinking? Oh, you've got a dark eye," she said, leaning in so that she could catch his stare. Will blinked rapidly and looked away, towards the different color shades beneath each small case.

"Just…a blue. Something blue."

"What are you cosplaying as?"

"Excuse me?" He did look at her then, then to her ponytail that bobbed as she laughed.

"Come on, age isn't a factor. You're thinking Cloud, right? No shame. These are the best for Cloud, and they're good enough to not only tint the one eye, but they'll cover the other eye, too, even though it's dark. That yours, or theirs?"

"Theirs," he muttered. The color for the contacts was off, but he wasn't going to linger. He followed the woman to the register and paid, fingers tapping on the counter as he stared at the small card machine.

"Well, you can surprise them with these, but no refunds if they're upset," she said.

"Alright."

"Some soulmates get upset is all I'm saying," she continued, bagging up the contacts. "They like to look at their partner and just see the link, right? That's what they've told me. But if you're going to cosplay, you gotta do it right."

“Right,” Will agreed a second too late. Receipt in hand, he was about to leave when he paused, noticing the meter outside of the door. “Do you see the guy that reads your meter?” he asked.

“…What?”

“Your meter reader,” he pressed. “Do you see him?”

“I mean, I guess,” she replied, circling the counter. She stood by him, too close, and she folded her arms and looked to the meter. “I see him walk over here.”

“He walks here?”

“Well yeah; he parks down the road and just walks house to house through the whole neighborhood. Said it gets him his exercise.”

“Right.” Will nodded, staring at the meter. “Right.”

She gave him a cursory glance, but Will didn’t care. He walked out of the store and studied the meter, then looked down the road where residential houses held more meters. He rolled the bag up small, stuffed it in his pocket and followed the trail of meters, looking around at the vantage points, curious. Soul Stealer scoped out the houses and looked for places with large backyards. He had to get close, close enough that no one would notice –a vehicle? A job where walking around and looking around was normal?

It was hot under the sun; he unbuttoned the top two buttons, what little good it did. There was a small breeze, enough to give relief and not distract him as he rubbed his one bad eye and hiked up a small hill. A patch of woods between the neighborhoods put him at a level above the house where the Soul Stealer once lurked, and he passed hands along trees, fingers tracing the bark. He wondered if Hannibal liked nature. He wondered if his skin would always feel like the burn of a tattoo needle when they were apart –a phantom ache that was tolerable until touched. A week. He just had to get through a week.

He knew precisely when he found the spot where the man must have watched because once he reached the large, imposing oak he paused, falling back against it and letting the shadow of the leaves hang over him to cool him off. It wasn’t a hard hike, but his legs ached from the constant, merciless running he did every night to exhaust himself. If he ran faster, maybe he could run Hannibal out of his blood?

He turned to look out over the hill, and he stared with only the mildest of surprise at the backyard of the Panter’s. Just to the side of the backdoor, the meter sat with quiet dignity. After the large fence, a backroad for utility workers. Just on the backroad, at the small turnabout, a white van sat.

He made the call, not because the Soul Stealer was in that van, but because he might have been in the van, and they had to cover all of their bases. Fingers tapped idly against the bulge in his pocket where his new eyes lay. His skin burned. There was a savage satisfaction in knowing that Hannibal’s skin burned, too.

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It wasn't the Soul Stealer, but a meter reader of fifteen years that didn't take kindly to being accused. He claimed they targeted him because he didn't have a soulmate, and their prejudice wouldn't go unanswered. Will kept his eyes different so that Bradshaw didn't say anything, and he took the abuse with as blank an expression as possible. They took his saliva and let him leave.

-

He found himself back in Baltimore, where another such location was found once he told the police what to look for. It'd been a week, and fingers tapped over coffee cups whose insides held the product of day old, reused coffee beans. His contacts itched in his eyes, but he kept them in. Crawford stood by him in the conference room, his presence enough to remind Will why he had to keep them in.

"Just to the side, a small copse of trees. We found a coke can with the same bite marks as the ones on both women," Jack said. "Good find, Dr. Graham."

"It's a pretty ugly teeth spread," Will noted.

"What are we looking at, then? Sex offenders?" Chief Norton asked. Beside him, several cops and detectives filtered in and out, their eyes on Will as he worked. He didn't like the pressure, the *knowing* that they had. Jack told him it was because of Hobbs and other profiles like him, but he couldn't help but wonder if the maroon still showed through the blue.

Maybe they just *knew*.

"Not really. If he has offenses, they're breaking and entering. Minor ones, too, nothing on the radar. He was a patient of Lecter's, but there were a lot of patients."

"He had bite marks on both women, though. He's a biter," a detective said behind him. Will pulled out a photo of the body and laid it out, tapping it.

"Biter, not a sucker. They're more because he bites, not because of sexual urges. He bit the coke can, he bit both women –eight on Mrs. Hess, seven on Mrs. Panter. Biters can be bar brawls, fights, cases as children…" His voice trailed off, and he bit his thumb idly. "We need to follow up on all of the patients I'd set aside.

"You set aside almost a hundred patients," another detective protested.

"Better one hundred than one thousand," Jack retorted.

"Is this the kind of stuff that helped you find Hobbs?" Chief Norton asked. He had a hazel eye and a green eye. Will wondered if he feared for his wife.

"Stuff like this, yeah," said Will.

"What tipped you off against Hobbs?"

Will considered the fat lobe of his ear, and he shrugged. “In his letter of resignation, he didn’t put an address.”

“An address,” Norton repeated flatly.

“It was odd. The others put addresses.” A beat. “I went to see him after I saw that.”

“Lots of people move around a lot, so they don’t have addresses,” Norton said.

“Why the fuck did you ask me for if you weren’t going to believe me,” Will snapped, dropping the photo. It fell and hit the table, a quiet sound but the only sound. Chief Norton’s brows lifted, first in surprise, then in displeasure. Behind him, several detectives flashed expressions ranging from disbelief to outright hostility. Loyalty to the brass. He should have checked his tone.

“Take a walk,” Jack suggested.

Will took a walk. From the precinct to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, it was precisely two miles, and when he entered the building his skin was tingling. He tried to hesitate by the doors, but his hands moved without his permission, his feet propelling him despite the thought that he should stop. Hannibal was close, and he could feel it just underneath all of the layers of his skin.

He was stopped by Dr. Chilton, whose smile radiated a calm and pleasant manner belied by the glee in his two brown eyes. Will almost barreled into him in an attempt to get around him.

“Dr. Graham, I’m so pleased I caught you. I understand you were in Minnesota?” Chilton gestured towards his office.

“Still working on the profile,” Will said, reluctantly following him. He turned right when he should have turned left, and he felt it in his gut much like a stab that traced right over his intestines. His muscles trembled with the effort to keep walking.

“Yes, the profile.” Chilton strolled into his office and turned about, fixing Will in place by the door. “I spoke with Dr. Lecter about your conversations with him, and he wasn’t inclined to give much in the way of information.”

“That’s his right,” Will managed. The gleam of interest grew.

“Yes, but what was interesting was his change in eye color, Dr. Graham. Did you happen to notice?”

Yes, yes; it’s mine, he’s mine, and that’s my soulmate you son-of-a-bitch.

“No,” Will said, and he forced himself to go through the motions of sitting down in one of the gauche leather chairs.

“Perhaps he sat in profile?”

"He did; when he could be bothered to stand, he moved about oddly the second day. I thought it was one of his forms of attempting to make me uneasy," Will said.

"It's blue, Dr. Graham. Blue like yours."

He'd prepared himself for this. Although he had access to things like colored contacts and sunglasses and an arsenal of anti-social behavior to keep people at more than an arm's distance, Hannibal Lecter had nothing. They would see his eyes, and they'd know. They'd *know*.

"…A half-connection," said Will, pressing his palms flat to his thighs. His voice came out smooth, flat.

"I've studied those in some part due to the nature of some of the patients here, and I thought it interesting to see such a thing occur with someone like Hannibal Lecter. Don't you find it odd?"

"It's an outlier but not impossible. Half-connections occur when one aspect of the person is inclined, but it doesn't react chemically within the other person."

"I thought, given the nature of your *work*, you'd be both intrigued and mortified," Chilton revealed. The look of self-satisfied smirking didn't abate, and Will wanted to rip the sneer from his lips.

"Intrigued but not mortified," Will lied. "How has his reaction been?"

"He's been bestial, in reality." Chilton waved a hand at the look of alarm on Will's face. "Nothing so horrid for the most part, mostly pacing. A lot of pacing. Rather than his normal forms of polite speech, he's been –dare I say –curt with the orderlies. His sleep patterns changed, according to Barney, and when food was brought just yesterday Matthew claimed he bared his teeth at him."

"Bared his teeth?" Will asked. He ignored the sliver of guilt, the gnawing that urged him to walk out of the office to see him.

"Yes, beastly," Chilton said, nodding at the expression on Will's face. "When I offered to sit down and discuss his concerns, he informed me that all he required was for me to inform you much the same as he said before: he had information regarding the recent killings."

Impeccable self-control. Not that Will would admit something like that, but it was impressive all the same. He ignored the tendril of pride at Hannibal being able to control himself so well –*his* soulmate would naturally be able to control his urges.

"He'd know the connection wasn't complete because he wouldn't feel any aspect of my person, but that does lend itself frustration on his part," Will admitted. "He tried to get into my head, much the way he does with others, but it wasn't the success he'd been hoping for." He'd felt Hannibal's incessant pacing, much the same way he'd felt when he was

particularly angry at the distance, pained at it. He dreaded the dreams where he felt his touch, the action a need that consumed all until he woke panting, surprised at the poignant *hurt*.

"Do you suppose to use it against him for information?" Chilton wondered.

"If it can be used, it will be," Will said. He'd taken Dr. Avery's words to heart. He stood, tired of the conversation. It was precisely four hundred yards away to reach Maximum security, another fifty yards to his cell. He needed to see him. He needed to be near him, if but for a moment. He felt a familiar hum of anticipation and knew Hannibal felt it, too. "Can I see him?"

"Oh, certainly. I think he'll find your lack of change disturbing," Chilton said cheerfully.

Will had the grace not to agree or disagree.

It took until the last stretch before he realized his pace had picked up, not quite keeping time with the orderly leading him there. His name was Matthew, and he walked with a sly spring in his step and a whistle on his lips.

"Partitions?" he asked as the dead bolts to the door came undone. With the sound came a leap of his pulse, his breath catching. He chastised himself for it.

"Yes."

He was able to wait for the partitions to be put up, idling in front of another cell whose occupant leaned against the bars, watching him. Hannibal was fifteen feet away. He crammed hands into pockets to prevent their infernal tapping.

"Dr. Graham, right? You know Dr. Bloom," the man said. He pressed his forehead to the bars. "Dr. Gideon, if you can recall."

"I recall," Will replied. "How are you, Dr. Gideon?" It was smart to be kind to Dr. Abel Gideon. A poor use of seasoning on a turkey during Thanksgiving had spelled the end for his wife and kids. Soulmates liked to say that if he'd waited to marry his soulmate, he'd have never done it. He had two green eyes, and Will avoided them.

"Just have the worst stomach cramps, but I believe it's the food here. Last time I ate something delicious, Dr. Bloom brought it to me as a gesture of good will."

"Dr. Bloom is all kindness," Will managed. The partition blocked the view of the edge of Hannibal's cell, and he took a step towards it; he swayed back.

"You caught five men in this row alone, Dr. Graham. You and the F-B-I," he observed, dragging the letters out. "Whenever you leave, they talk about it to each other, shouting. Awful racket, that is."

"If it's disturbing you-"

"Oh, not at all, but I do need my beauty rest. I think you've made some enemies."

“Back off, Gideon,” Matthew said, strolling back. He motioned to him, and the doctor smiled, sauntering back to his bed.

“Yes, Mr. Brown. A pleasant chat, Dr. Graham. Give Dr. Bloom my regards.”

“Yes,” Will said, but if it was loud enough to be heard, he couldn’t know for certain. He looked to the partitions and the chair that waited, and his heart stuttered.

He rounded the corner, and his eyes sought Hannibal out without his consent. He stood waiting at the bars, and if it wasn’t for the look of utter hunger on his face, Will would have thought he was unfazed with the distance, unfeeling in face of a week without seeing, hearing, touching. Will felt it, though, the sudden lurching sensation as their eyes met, two blues against one maroon and one blue, and he was walking before he thought to walk, bypassing the chair entirely as he reached the bars and stumbled to a stop before he could crash into them.

He wasn’t aware of reaching, only the sensation of peace once he’d reached. A rush of endorphins flooded him, and he let out a quiet sigh, a sound that should have been mortifying if he had it in him to feel such a thing. He was aware of hands cupping his jaw, thumbs brushing over his cheekbones to tickle his eyelashes that fluttered closed at the relief. His fingers curled over the heartbeat that pounded against his palm, and when their foreheads touched he trembled. This was right. This was *right*.

“My Will,” Hannibal said, and his voice was guttural, possessive. “My Will thought to stay away from me, but he couldn’t.”

“Stop talking,” Will replied, and his voice cracked. “Just…stop talking.”

“I felt you, dear Will,” he murmured. “As you slept, as you feared, as you ached, as you hungered. Is that what it is to be an empath like yourself? The lines of identity blur?”

“What you’re feeling right now is a rush of endorphins, much like the feelings you attain when drinking, smoking, or even receiving attention from social media. This will pass, and you’ll feel fine again.” It didn’t sound so convincing as he spoke. He thought to open his eyes, but he didn’t want to see the jumpsuit, the curve of his adam’s apple or the whorl of the fingertips caressing his skin. Hannibal shifted closer, then pressed into the bars so that he could rest his cheek on top of Will’s head. If the botched angle bothered him, he didn’t give any indication.

“You’re trying to make this something purely scientific, but your heartbeat tells me you are just as relieved to see me as I am to see you.”

“Stop trying to get into my head,” Will hissed, and Hannibal tilted his face up so that he could look him in the eye, one maroon and one blue.

“I’m already there,” he said genially. “What an interesting place it is to be.”

Will pulled away from him then, and he forced himself to sit down on the chair, his muscles clenching with the need to go back. He looked to Hannibal’s eyes, mismatched and

narrowed on him, and he shuddered, pressing his hands to his face. The adrenaline at seeing him was fading, leaving him with the sensation of uncleanliness, of dirt and filth.

"If you thought to punish me, you seem to have harmed yourself in the process," he commented when Will didn't speak. He stayed close to the bars, and as he walked along them, Will had the distinct impression of lions at the zoo –not the ones born in captivity, but the ones born wild, remembering just who and what they were before they were enclosed within their cage.

"I'm trying to catch a killer, Dr. Lecter," he said wearily.

"Hannibal," he prompted lightly.

"I was in Minnesota."

"Yes." He paused, like hearing those words eased some of his internal struggle. "You went to the house of the first victim."

"Yes."

"You're telling me to comfort me with the thought that you were not intentionally parting from me in order to torment me. Respectable, Dr. Graham," he said. His slow, steady pacing continued.

Will thought of Dr. Avery, steeling himself. It was not impossible to lie to a soulmate, although more often than not there was a distinct lack of desire. He felt it then, the ugly thought that out of anyone in the world, his soulmate was the last person he should lie to. He wet his lips, parted them, and coughed to dispel the tension in his ribs. "I need your help."

"You need my help, I need mental stimulation. You went through my files?"

"I've gotten it down to about fifty," he said.

"Better than most," Hannibal praised. He paused and lightly drew a finger down the metal bar. "What did you see?"

"You said the eyes match too well," Will said. "A soulmate whose eye pigment only changed color the slightest?"

"Potentially, yes. What did you learn in Minnesota, Dr. Graham?"

"He uses guises such as meter readers and other technical occupations to lay low and undercover when he is choosing the homes."

"Perhaps the homes were already chosen, and he merely uses them as ways to be closer, to observe without being observed," Hannibal mused.

"He wasn't one of your violent, volatile patients. It's too obvious," Will said. "You wouldn't have directed me there if he was."

“Perhaps he’s not there at all, and it is merely to divert you,” Hannibal suggested.

“I’d feel the lie,” Will replied. “…If you lie to me, I’ll leave.”

“Would you?”

“You’d never see me again,” he vowed. It was a lie, but it was a good one, the kind that came out smooth and kept a steady heartbeat. “You’d never touch me again.”

“I can feel your hunger, Will Graham,” Hannibal replied after a moment. “Don’t place a bet on something you’re not willing to lose.”

“You’ve also felt other things.”

Hannibal tilted his head the other way, tracing his outline with starving eyes. After a moment, he smiled. “Your dreams.”

“I’d kill myself if it meant you hurt,” Will warned him. “If you’re not going to help me, I’ll make this as horrific as possible for you.”

“The masochist at work.” Hannibal heard him, though. Be it the way his gaze looked about the cell, a show of considering his ultimatum, or the hands that swung to clasp behind his back, he heard the threat loud and clear. He walked to his table, considered his drawings. A hand delicately glided along the papers, and he smiled, the faintest hints of delight in his eyes.

“Quid pro quo, Dr. Graham. I help you suss out this killer in your mind, and you tell me things I’d like to know.”

“…What sort of things,” Will asked slowly.

“Nothing untoward, nothing…invasive. You want answers, and I get to ask questions. You don’t scurry along and keep the two of us in pained misery for your haphazard claims to justice, and I am as pleasant and affable as you can expect me to be.” If he could be considered pleasant, no matter how polite he was. Will focused on his breathing, on the feel of his pants beneath his palms, and he let out a short, curt breath of air.

“Yes…alright.”

Before he left, he paused at the bars and swallowed down a question he desperately wanted to ask. As if sensing it, Hannibal drew close once more, an energy radiating from him that made Will’s skin warm at the proximity.

He tilted his head, held his palm out to Will as a silent offering. Will swallowed with difficulty, reached out and grasped it, lifting it up so that he could press it to his cheek, head dipped down with a dark sort of shame. He inhaled deeply, nose brushing against his wrist, lips parted in a silent sigh. Beneath the scent of generic soap, there was something sharp, like cinnamon and sandalwood. It made his blood boil, made an odd pressure twist in his chest.

In his desperation, in his need for touch, there was a sense of something much like relief, and it took several heartbeats to realize that it wasn't his own that sat, warm and content in his stomach, but Hannibal's. Despite his mild manner, despite how he smiled and cooed and pretended at civility, there was a ragged edge of something pained, something he hid with utmost desperation that'd been fast fraying before Will had arrived. Will felt it, though. He felt it, and he felt the physical contact ease over it with the smoothest of caresses, with every exhale of his breath against his skin. It was dizzying, and as Hannibal's thumb lightly stroked his cheekbone, the feeling of contentment, of respite grew until it pressed tight against his skin, not enough room for the both of them inside of his mind.

When he walked away, the scent stayed with him long after. Neither one of them spoke a word. Neither of them, Will supposed, were prepared to acknowledge just how much it'd hurt to be apart.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for your comments/support! Seriously, one of the nicest fandoms I've ever seen. I've never had people inspired to do cover photos or anything amazing like that, and I just...aaaaah. AAAAAH. :D Seriously, a writer's dream come true.

I mean, in reality though, you guys knew Will wasn't going to be able to stay away too long, haha.

Chapter Inspiration: 'Storm Song' by Phildel

One Black, One Blue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 6:

He stayed in the depths of the FBI HQ for the rest of the day as well as the next morning, up to his elbows in reading through the different patients Lecter took extensive notes on. Will would credit him this: he was organized. He kept clear, concise information in a slanted script, the details of a person more than whether or not they thought it right to laugh at a funeral. He examined their micro-expressions, the way they clasped their hands on their knees, the way their eyes cut to the side after a difficult question. Hannibal Lecter saw all.

He wasn't rescued from his work by a moment of eureka, but by his phone buzzing at his hip.

"Graham here."

"It's Alana."

He rubbed the bad eye, like she could somehow see it over the phone and through his 'Cloud blue' contacts.

"How are you?"

"How are *you*?" Alana asked. Her emphasis would have been mildly insulting if it was anyone but her.

"Trying to read between the thin lines Lecter left," said Will, thumbing through another patient's file. There were two that stood out to him in stark relief against the shitty lights of the evidence locker, but he wasn't sure if it was because of Occam's Broom or because he'd found something substantial. "Why?"

"Jack called."

"Are you my keeper?" Will snorted derisively.

"Well, that's why I told you. He asked me to be discreet, and I said I wouldn't lie to you. Also, you'd know if I lied to you."

"I would," Will agreed.

"He said you stormed out of the police precinct because they asked you about Hobbs."

Will leaned back in his chair and peered up at the corkboard ceiling, rubbing his mouth to soften the words that he wanted to hurl out. He shouldn't have cussed at the chief.

His mind made leaps people couldn't follow –always had. Jack was best at trying to reel him in so that he could understand, but someone from the Baltimore police wouldn't see what he was saying unless he took the time to flower it up.

"I took a walk," he said at last. "I needed a walk."

"I've seen you talk about Hobbs before, Will. This wasn't just about Hobbs, was it?" He knew what she was asking without having to clarify. Time did that to people, he supposed –you knew without knowing, heard without hearing. Then there was him, and he saw the little pieces most people left behind.

"You were right, Alana. He's a son-of-a-bitch," Will admitted.

"Did he get in your head?"

"…It felt like ants crawling around my skull. He took one look, then another, and he saw as much as I saw."

"You saw, though?" Alana sounded surprised.

"He said that if I wanted to get the scent of a killer, I only had to look in the mirror." He had looked in the mirror. Several times. Too many times. He wanted to shatter the mirror in his hotel room the way Soul Stealer had.

"How did you feel, hearing that?"

"Psychoanalyzing me, Dr. Bloom?" he quipped, not quite kind but not unkind. Somewhere grey, somewhere in between.

"Asking as a friend, Will. Three years, then you jumped in cold turkey to something you'd wanted to leave behind."

"…It felt like I never left. I sat in that room, and I looked at the evidence, and I saw it the same way I used to. The Soul Stealer and I have a lot in common."

"You also have crucial differences," Alana pointed out. "Mostly your kindness-"

"-Even Molly would laugh at that, Alana, Jesus-"

"-and your ability to empathize and treat people as people rather than playthings," she finished.

Silence. Will chewed on the pen cap and jotted a note down, staring down at the notes in front of him. It was nice to know she could sense his unease at a distance, feel the way he was uncertain of his own mind. Years did that for them, made things soft with understanding rather than disquieted. She never treated him like a patient, although she was honest with him like one. There was a reason they stayed friends, even after their experiences together didn't one day monumentally shift as her eyes became his. While he'd relished in the lack of change, Alana had decided to walk away.

“I saw Dr. Gideon. He misses your home cooked meals.”

“Are you going to make the rounds on all of the inmates I’ve spoken to there?” she asked.

“I thought about it,” he replied thoughtfully. “He sounded almost fond of you.”

“I spoke to him as a doctor rather than a psychopath, that’s why.” He could almost hear the sound of her struggling to say more, trying to weigh the words. “…If you’re not doing well-”

“I’m alright,” he reassured her.

“Are you? Dr. Chilton said you’ve visited with Dr. Lecter a few times now.”

“He’s going to make this a show, but I’ve got a few tricks up my sleeve to get him talking the way I need him to.” A pause. He wasn’t going to go into detail about the tricks up his sleeve. “I think it helps that he didn’t know me before.”

“He’d be curious about you,” Alana admitted, and she didn’t sound happy about that.

“He is,” Will agreed. “From my grief counseling to my two blue eyes and my promise ring. Like getting my skin peeled with a cheese grater.” Silence. “He knew we dated.”

“Yes, I’d mentioned you before,” Alana said.

“He said he recognized me by my smell. You smelled of me.”

“He has always had a sharp nose,” Alana said. “He knew if I stayed over at your house instead of mine because of the smell of my shampoo, too.”

“Huh.” Will fiddled with his pen, tossed it to the side. He wondered if Hannibal found comfort in the scent of his cologne, now that they were soulmates. He’d have asked, if asking didn’t sound so utterly stupid; if it didn’t imply he cared about the answer.

He grabbed the pen again and pocketed it since he’d chewed on the cap. He grabbed the two profiles and tucked them into his bag, then found his way out of the locker with a vague wave towards the agent at the desk by the door. He wondered if Lecter had ever tried to meet his eyes, then. Probably not. Will was pretty damn good at avoiding eyes.

Not good enough, apparently.

“How does Molly feel?”

“Molly thinks I can help people,” he said, and he rubbed his stomach when it panged. Hannibal wanted to see him. He didn’t want to see Hannibal. A twenty-four hour period wasn’t enough for him to feel like he’d adequately washed away the feel of Lecter’s fingertips passing just under the hollow of his eyes.

“You do help people. Just make sure one of those people is you, Will.”

“I should take your one-liners and print them out on inspiration posters –you know the kind?”

“And you should know that your snippy, deflective humor doesn’t fool me,” she retorted.

“The best one I saw in high school was a cat hanging from a branch. It said, ‘hang in there,’” he continued shamelessly. He noted the deference a few desk jockeys gave him when they saw him, and he wondered what Jack had said to warrant such a behavior from them. Maybe he’d regaled them of tales of Will getting a read on them so acute that he could speak of their lives like he’d lived it personally. That would have rattled some of them up, if their lives had been less than exemplary.

“At the risk of sounding cliché, I’m going to ask if you’re hanging in there,” she said, and he heard the smile in her voice.

“…I am,” he replied, and at the scent of freshly mowed grass, he inhaled deeply. The day was already promising to be hot; he needed an air conditioner and a new eye.

“Are you feeling pretty stable?”

“Enough for a few horses and a mule,” he promised.

-

In his dreams, he lay in a field of poppies. Someone caressed his skin like a lover, and he choked on the razor’s edge of the mirror shattering over him.

-

Crawford’s call woke him early morning, and he picked up with bleary, watering eyes.

“I got something,” Jack said.

“Something good?” Will sat up, grabbing the shirt he’d discarded on the other half of the bed. He ignored the pillow he’d been holding close to his chest, a poor man’s comfort. He wasn’t sure if he’d been reaching for Molly or Hannibal in his sleep.

“By the tree with the killer’s coke can, we found a design. Could have been kids, but I doubt it. I’m sending the image now, and I’ve got Katz on the way since it looks Chinese in nature.”

“There’s a racial stereotype in there somewhere,” Will said, putting the phone on speakerphone. When the image came up, he studied it, tilting his head one way, then the other. “Doesn’t look like a swiss army knife made that.”

“My thoughts exactly. Do you recognize it?”

“It’s a Mahjong tile, isn’t it?” Will didn’t play Mahjong, but he did have a Molly who most certainly did. The name of her games were Sudoku, Mahjong, Spider Solitaire, and Minesweeper. The bored housewife’s evening ritual while the news droned and the husband napped in the recliner.

“I don’t think the killer was playing Mahjong as he waited,” Jack said dryly. “Meet me down here.”

Will grabbed the two files he’d taken with him from the evidence locker, and he got ready as quickly as he was able. It’d taken more time than normal to wear his body down to sleep the night before, his feet pounding the conveyer belt of the treadmill for too long. Hannibal stayed awake, even as he tried to close his eyes. Whatever his thoughts, they were his own, but the feelings in regards to them were enough to keep Will in a state of a half-sleep, not quite resting but not quite awake.

Beverly, Zeller, and Price were in the lab when he got there, and their conversation scuttled to a stop when he came in. He nodded to Jack, poised over a small cut of bark from the tree, and hesitated on the opposite side of the table. The arches of his feet ached from a lack of support, and he shifted from foot to foot, looking down at the wood then up to them expectantly.

“It’s the symbol for the Red Dragon Mahjong tile,” Beverly said. She looked as tired as he felt.

“Cuts are identical to the blade used to carve up both of the victims,” Zeller added. He was a young counterpart to the older, small man beside him that lifted up a finger, as if to contradict.

“You know, I played Mahjong growing up with my grandmother,” he revealed. “That symbol also can be used as a gesture of ‘got it’ or ‘that’s the mark’ in other games.”

“He found his vantage point long before he attacked, then,” Will said, glancing to Crawford. “That’s how he found it again.”

“Any luck on the profiles from Lecter’s files?” Jack asked.

“Two stand out to me, but we need to find them, first,” Will said. It’d been a hell of a job weeding through so many, but he’d done it. He pulled the files out and tossed them onto the table for everyone to see. “Tobias Budge, Baltimore resident with a one-sided soulmate now deceased by the name of Franklyn.”

“Deceased?”

“Franklyn was the one side of the soulmate,” Will said. His fingers twitched with the need to touch his eye, to check that the contact was straight. “Lecter said look for the eyes that match too well, and it’s common in dynamics of one-sided couples that there’s an imbalance due to that, if a relationship begins at all. He’d struggled with delusions of grandeur and intrusive thoughts leading to use of anti-psychotics under Lecter’s care.”

“Worth a shot,” Jack said with a nod.

“Second is Francis Dolarhyde, a soulmate that longed for a soulmate. He never admitted to why or how he was without one, but his eyes are recorded as the same color despite being listed as having a soulmate.”

“Soulmates can have the same color of eyes,” Zeller said. He had two blue eyes, not for the reason he was defending Dolarhyde’s possession of two brown. Will looked to his lips and compressed his own tightly, shrugging.

“It’s uncommon in the states, but not at all impossible,” he agreed. “He had a psychosomatic lisp, and Soul Stealer more than likely has a speech impediment of some sort, if his teeth spread is anything to go on. He believes he’s deformed; at least, in every aspect of his mind he is.”

“What are you thinking?” Jack asked.

He tapped his fingers idly on the table, looking down to the bark. “I’m thinking, ‘he doesn’t just like this sign.’”

“It means more to him?”

“A clever way for him to mark his place,” Zeller said with a shrug. Will ignored him.

“I’m thinking, ‘he could have used anything, from a rock to a cloth piece to a simple gash for marking his space in which he watched the beginning of the end of Mrs. Hess’ and Mrs. Panter’s lives. He did this sign, and he did it with the same knife he cut the victims up with.’”

“There’s more to it?” Jack pressed.

“Maybe culturally? No, maybe…maybe socially, spiritually. Maybe he likes the sign, maybe it’s a symbol for more to him.”

“We’ll try and track down both men for questioning, see where we get,” Jack said.

After, when Price had pulled Zeller away to inspect the diatoms in a particular sample of water they’d found from another crime scene, Beverly got him coffee from the break room before he left, an offering.

“I’m seeing someone,” she declared as Will relished in the taste of true awakening. He peeked at her eyes, one black and one blue, then focused on her hairline.

“Avoiding his eyes, just in case?”

“I was going to ask you about that, since you’re here and you’re not going to send me a bill after,” she replied with a laugh.

“I might.”

“His name’s Saul, and he’s great. No soulmate, no nothing.”

“‘No soulmate, no nothing,’” he echoed.

“It’s been about six months, and nothing’s changed. I’m not expecting it to, but…you and Molly. You’re great together, and you’re not soulmates. I know it’s not so cut-and-dry. There’s a reason there’s a science behind it, not some fate and Jesus-inspired mumbo jumbo,” she said, and there was a self-conscious twitch as she started to reach towards her discolored eye. She stopped herself, and Will wished she’d have finished the motion so that he could see what she’d have done.

“Our experiences shape us, Beverly,” he said. “You can connect with someone without your DNA deciding to connect, too.”

“It doesn’t make it less special.” She was trying to convince herself, not him.

“It won’t feel like before,” he warned her. “Even if the one before wasn’t a soulmate, it wouldn’t have felt like before. Relationships are…unique. I speak easier with you than I do with Zeller.”

“That’s because you walk into Zeller’s lab and stir the shit,” she said with a laugh.

“I’ve known him just as long as you, and you don’t mind when I point something out that you missed.”

“I’m smart, but I’m also smart enough to know when I’m not the smartest in the room.”

“Bottom line,” he continued, a little flustered at the compliment, “don’t stop dating him. If you’re happy, and he’s happy, don’t hold off on the hope that one day your chemical makeup sees someone it wants to bond with –not because hope is wrong, but because you don’t need that to connect to people. Theories state that the first initial soulmate bonding occurred between people that struggled to connect on a mental level with their peers through speech and circumstances in early civilizations. It was a way to ensure that they survived.”

Beverly stewed on his words as he sipped his coffee. There was a gentle lull in his stomach that told him that while he worked, Hannibal slept.

“I don’t want to wake up one day and see that his eyes change, and it’s not me anymore,” she finally confessed. “I like this one, Will.”

“It’s an active choice to be with a soulmate,” he said firmly. His eyes burned. “No matter your urges, no matter what you *feel*, you choose them in the aftermath, when the rush subsides. We’re advanced enough that we have that option. We’d be stupid to waste free agency on something cosmic like fate.”

“Only you’d crap on the idea of the cosmos knowing better than us,” Beverly said with a snicker. It comforted her, though. She could rest easy knowing that if Saul left for a soulmate, it was because he was a jackass and not because God hated her.

-

One cup of FBI coffee wasn't enough. He found the nearest coffee place that wasn't a Starbucks and seated himself outside, picking apart a plain bagel with cheese. He'd wanted the chonga bagel, but plain was all they had, and Molly wasn't around to tease him for bemoaning that fact. A fair was coming to town, and the poster just across the street boasted a married couple with five people, all soulmates with one another, papers to confirm that each of their eyes held distinct pigments of the other four. He thought to laugh about it, but it wasn't funny. People like the sister-wives shows made bank off of the idea that you could connect with so many people –why choose one when you could have all?

He'd been consulted on a case, once, about a polyamorous relationship. The issue hadn't been the polyamory, but the fact that one woman in the relationship didn't realize she was part of a polyamorous relationship until she decided to move in with her soulmate and found him living with four other women, eyes mismatched beyond belief until DNA tests were complete. Autopsy later revealed that he'd been poisoned, the killing blow from a rather potent drink she'd made him.

On the stand, she confessed that some men just couldn't hold their arsenic.

He waited until he finished his drink –chai tea with hazelnut, if he was being honest – then found his way to the institution, the front of his shirt damp from the rental car spewing air conditioner fluid onto his lap when he'd turned it on. He'd calmly turned the air conditioning off and drove with the windows down, instead.

"He just woke up and had breakfast," Barney told him, leading him to maximum. Will thought to say, 'I know,' but he wasn't stupid. According to Beverly, he was sometimes the smartest man in the room.

Too bad he didn't feel that way sitting down across from Lecter.

The rest of maximum was quiet, the lull after breakfast when the medicine kicked in and the inmates were quiet. Will sat down, the ease that he felt utterly distasteful in the wake of who he was looking at. Hannibal sat at the desk, book in hand, and neither one spoke. Will shifted, crossed his leg, and decided to wait him out. Unlike before, when he'd all but thrown himself against the bars, he was relieved to find that the initial connection, after over a week of torment, was beginning to fade. His body was used to the intrusion. It was recognizing the second presence within its blood as familiar, friendly -God, what a thought *that* was.

Lecter waited until he'd apparently finished his chapter before he asked, "Did your father have a soulmate, Will?"

Will chewed on his lip, considered lying. Quid pro quo. He sighed and rubbed the ache between his brows. "Yes."

"What happened?"

"Questions about mom? That's a little ham-handed, don't you think?" he asked.

“What was ham-handed was Dr. Chilton attempting to wheedle information from me about our discussions here. Did you know that when I first arrived, he attempted the Thematic Apperception Test on *me*. He was just twitching for the MF13 to show up, and I laughed outright at him.”

“I can assume you avoided any connotations to sex,” Will replied. “I know he’d claimed you avoided prison due to a Ganser Syndrome.”

“My entire experience here has been ham-handed, as you can easily see. My question may be such to you, but I ask it with genuine interest.”

“She left him.” The words were clipped, curt. Three words, but they splintered on the way out, made his gum bleed. At the tone of his voice, Hannibal snapped the book shut and set it down, crossing his leg as he leaned back against his chair.

“Was he a drinker? Did he take a hand to you too many times –to her too many times? Soulmate violence is not impossible, as you said. The newspapers they allow me to read show articles, although they’re always painted with such vibrantly purple prose.”

“He did the best he could.”

“Why did she leave, Will?”

“Isn’t that the question everyone wonders?” he managed after a beat. “Quid pro quo, Dr. Lecter. Tell me about Tobias Budge.”

“Tobias Budge,” Hannibal mused, and he looked about the room, apparently deep in thought. “He was a musician, and he made strings for the Baltimore Symphony. He came into my office one day and complained of fantasies of placing the neck of a cello down a man’s throat so that he could play him.”

“He had a partner by the name of Franklyn with a half-connection. Franklyn’s eye turned, Tobias’ didn’t.”

“Yes, although I knew precisely why. Franklyn was neurotic, and he connected with the aspects of Tobias that were grounding, calm and assured. There was absolutely nothing about that man that Tobias Budge’s chemical makeup desired.”

The meaningful look Hannibal gave Will made his skin tingle. He ignored the unspoken reference to his own chemical desires and focused on watching his shoulder.

“Franklyn’s death was suicide, Tobias told me,” Hannibal continued when Will didn’t rise to his bait. “Although I’d always wondered if that was entirely true. He went through the motions of anti-psychotics, but did he take them? Or was it merely a front to put the people around him at a false sense of ease?”

“He struggled for a connection, according to your notes. Someone that would hear his fantasies and not shy away from him in the aftermath of his desires.”

“He did,” Hannibal agreed. “Why do you think your mother left without taking you?”

"…I didn't try and question it," Will managed. Not a lie, but a painful truth.

"Question it now, dear Will. She'd found a soulmate, fostered a life with him and in doing so created a life. You now know the pain of separating yourself from such a person, how it burns under your skin like a curling iron left on too long and grasped firmly in an unsuspecting hand, so use your intelligence and your infinitely mirrored mind and tell me what you think."

It was a compliment, but it didn't feel quite as good as a compliment should. He studied the bolts keeping the table from becoming a weapon in Lecter's cell, and he exhaled sharply. "Soulmates aren't the end-all. Our society especially banks on their use as the best mode of finding a partner, but because some part of you connects doesn't mean all of you will."

"You resist our connection," Hannibal practically purred. "With every other aspect of yourself."

"We are always growing and adapting. We're shaped by our experiences. What connected two people in a bad situation that they endured together isn't necessarily qualified to keep them together when they are faced with new challenges and new opportunities.

"They may have connected because they both wished to be out of a small town with small ideals, but ten years down the road they looked at one another, and while my father may have still seen the woman he first connected to, she'd endured something completely different in those ten years and couldn't reconcile her feelings with the man in front of her. She may have felt the urge to love him, to want to be near him, but she was not in love with him."

Will peered over at Hannibal's drawings, studying the architecture of a new building. The lines were romantic, the shading that of a sun shining directly over the arches. He wondered where Lecter had traveled to in order to see that. He wondered if the mother he never knew had traveled there, too.

"How utterly unromantic of you," Hannibal finally said, amused. "I'm sure you were quite the catch in the dating world when you talked like that. However did you meet your partner?"

"The FBI found a symbol on a tree that was used as a vantage point to overlook Mrs. Hess's backyard. They're going to check for such a symbol at the Panter's home as well. Will you look at it?"

Hannibal stood and strolled to the bars. When Will went to the drop box, he tsk'd.

"No, no, no, Dr. Graham. We are establishing trust, we are reconciling ourselves with our chemical bond; the last thing you should do is deliberately find ways to avoid me," he chided. "You can't be sure my eagerness to help will remain if you make it so poignantly clear you wish to avoid my touch."

"I do wish to avoid your touch," Will said irritably, but he found himself walking towards Hannibal all the same. He passed the paper through the bars, and Hannibal accepted

it, fingertips brushing the back of his hand gently. The feeling sent sparks along his skin, and he took a shaky step back, stuffing his hands into his pockets. A traitorous thought whispered that if that's how good a mere brush of skin felt, how wonderful would it be to kiss him?

To fuck him?

"Thank you," Hannibal murmured. He held the paper up and studied it, and if he saw anything of note, he gave nothing away.

"I thought the symbol meant more to him. It's a Mahjong tile," Will explained.

"Maybe he just likes Mahjong," Hannibal said with the suggestion of a smile on his lips. It took a second for Will to realize he was teasing.

"It's the Red Dragon Mahjong tile," Will added.

That did give Lecter pause. He turned the photo this way, then that way; he strolled along his cell to lay it down on the table, smoothing it out. Will noted the forced calm, the relaxed appearance when in truth he felt Lecter's emotions coiled deep in his belly, wound tightly and ready to spring. He had something. He *knew* something.

"Do you suppose he is of Chinese descent?" Hannibal asked. Lie, a lie. Will moved closer to the bars, the hiss of a retort sharp on his lips.

"You've got to be-" He blinked, and Hannibal stood just before him as well, like he sensed Will's ability to hear his paltry attempt at redirection. His head dipped down, and Will rocked forward, the smallest of whispers separating them. He was a half second away from a bad decision.

"Yes?" Hannibal prompted.

"Don't lie to me," he murmured, eyes on Hannibal's lips.

"Was it a lie?"

"You know something about the Red Dragon," he said. His voice was low, gravelly. Hannibal leaned forward, and Will leaned back; his heart screamed to fucking kiss him already. His head kept his feet firmly in place.

"Do I?"

"Tell me, Hannibal." He tilted his head slightly, much the way he'd watched Lecter do. "I'm playing your game. Give me something."

"Do you suppose the Red Dragon is something more than just that tile with a simple character? He could not have etched a real dragon in any short amount of time."

"Symbolic to *a* red dragon, not this one in particular," Will whispered. That close, Lecter's skin smelled like sweet sin and generic soap. Lecter leaned away, and Will found himself leaning in, wanting to trace his tongue over it.

“Do you think he believes he’s killing these women, or do you think he’s changing them?” When Will’s heart panged, Lecter nodded slowly. “Yes, you think so, too. A change, not a death.”

“They’re becoming something more,” he said. “*He’s* becoming something more.”

“A Great, Red Dragon,” Hannibal uttered with hushed reverence. “One of terrible strength, of tremendous awe and power.”

Will had what he needed; now it was time to go. He didn’t, though –couldn’t. His eyes flicked up to Hannibal’s mismatched pair, and his breath caught. In the light of maximum, their hunger was stark, grasping. His feet were frozen in place, unheeding of the fact he had something, *something*, and he’d been able to trick Hannibal Lecter to get it.

It didn’t feel like he’d tricked anyone, though; it felt like he’d walked into a trap.

“If I kiss you now, would you ask me for more?” Hannibal wondered. The timbre of his voice was low, pitched with unmasked desire. Will shuddered at the sound of it.

Hannibal reached and grasped his chin, tilting his head up. A rush of endorphins made thought sluggish, a drugged feeling of bliss at the contact, the sensation of everything being *just right*. He was trapped, but as the seconds ticked on the watch at his wrist, he wondered if he could call it trapped when he was exactly where he wanted to be. They moved closer. If Hannibal tried to kiss him, he’d fucking let him.

Rescue came from the sound of the maximum security doors opening with a sharp, commanding thud of deadbolts turning. Will leapt away from Lecter, skin burning, and he tried to compose himself, hands fumbling at the rumbled shirt that reeked of Freon. Across the way from him, Hannibal Lecter stayed pressed to the bars, his eyes tracking each movement Will made with a hunger.

“…Run along now, Dr. Graham,” he said quietly. “Before I make you stay.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all of your lovely support! I'm honestly having the time of my life with this. :)

As a side note, would y'all be interested in me doing random soulmate one-shots? I've really been happy with the soulmate world I've been building, and exploring different aspects of it through random au's (within this au if that makes sense) with our lovely Hannibal characters seems like a lot of fun. Sometimes fluff, sometimes angst, idk yet, but I've already got a random one-shot I had to get out of my head so why not?

Song Inspiration: 'Icarus' by Bastille

Two Sneaky Blues

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 7:

Freddie Lounds was waiting outside for him when he descended the steps. He knew because a camera was shoved unceremoniously in his face, the flash blinding him for several seconds.

“Will Graham, out of retirement in order to catch a killer,” she said, lowering her camera. In the bright light of the day, he knew she’d used the flash in order to disorient him, give herself a few moments to try and get control of the situation. She had two stunning, matching baby blues that were wide-eyed, like she'd miss something if she blinked. He pushed past her and kept walking, pawing at his pocket for his phone to call Beverly and have her look up references to a Great Red Dragon. His skin still tingled from the close proximity to Lecter, and he resisted the urge to touch fingers to his lips.

“I won’t talk to you, Freddie,” he snapped.

“It must be bad for Crawford to hunt you down and ask for help, huh? They even have you going after another one for insight.” She kept pace, and he lengthened his stride, glancing up to the fat, puffy clouds that witnessed his struggles with silent mockery.

“Lounds, you’re a lying sack of shit, and your newspaper is trash,” he said, and his voice spiked, jumped.

“Is this the first killer they’ve had you profile since-”

“Lounds.” Will rounded on her and glared, from her paisley tights to her plaid skirt and her hideous chiffon shirt. “Get out of my face.”

“Just one conversation,” she urged him, unheeding of the way his hands curled to fists. “Come on, let me get the first story out there, and we can tell them whatever it is you want the public to know.”

“I want them to know you’re a two-bit hack that couldn’t cut it at a real job, so you fell into shit editorials writing bad advertising for miracle cream until they let you get a small spread on the back page because you had a penchant for lying. Then, desperate to catch a break, you snuck into the hospital I was staying at, and you took a fucking photo of me in a hospital bed while I was sleeping so that you could get the scoop on the case to up sales. You gonna tell them that, Freddie? Huh?”

Freddie stared at him, and the wind tousled her hair, the scent of Suave Watermelon shampoo strong. Her baby blue eyes widened, then narrowed. She had a way of pursing her

lips like she was a fox, nose turned to the scent. She laughed, a gentle huff of breath and she tilted her head, tucking a strand behind her ear.

"You haven't changed a bit," she said, pocketing her camera. It wasn't a compliment. "I'll see you around."

"The hell you will," he growled, and he stowed away in his car once she was gone, gripping the steering wheel tightly in an effort to ground himself and calm down.

He hated Freddie Lounds –an understatement. After Garrett Jacob Hobbs, his stint in a psychiatric hospital had been kept quiet, respected. Not for Freddie. She'd climbed the fence, picked the lock to a side door, and found her way into his room where he slept, photos of his gaunt face and the scar along his neck in stark relief to the gloom. Tattler had boasted record sales after that spread, and Freddie Lounds went from back page, six inch column to front page work.

That was *after* she'd snuck into his hospital room to get a good photo of his colostomy bag and stomach scar, courtesy of Garrett Jacob Hobbs. She had a penchant for unwanted flash photography.

He called Jack for the distraction, and to relay news. Jack picked up on the first ring.

"It's not Budge, but we brought Budge in," he said by way of greeting.

"Freddie Lounds is –what?"

"I went with a couple of Baltimore cops to question the bastard, and when I stepped outside to take a call, I came back to one of them dead on the floor, and the basement door open. Found the other officer dead, and Budge tried to get me with some violin wire."

Will chewed on his bottom lip, mouth working. Outside, he watched a man smoking on the bench, and the couple beside him resented it. Their misery and refusal to speak up ruminated in the smoke overhead. All three of them were troubled with unsaid words. So was he, but at least he had a car as a barrier.

"I was only gone three hours," he told Jack quietly.

"Three is enough," Jack replied.

"You okay?"

"He didn't get me," Jack assured him. "He's missing an ear now, though."

"A true punishment for a musician."

"There's human remains here, but it's all intestines, and not just from two people. We've got him in custody and we've got fingerprints, saliva, you name it. He's killed people, but he's not the one. Looks like he was making strings out of human remains. Katz called it cat gut strings."

“Rather than kill a cat, he harvested from man,” Will said.

“Well, we’ve got him and a whole basement full of enough to lock him up good.” Jack would have sounded triumphant if he didn’t sound so tired. Two dead cops for one living killer. A bad trade, no matter who was concerned.

“He’s not the one,” Will echoed, and he drummed fingers on the steering wheel. “But he is one.”

“Good eye, Will. You found a killer without even really looking.”

“I only looked because he sounded like a killer,” Will said. “He had the knack for it, in Lecter’s notes.”

“Either way, next stop is tracking down Francis Dolarhyde. Bastard better behave a bit better.”

“About the dragon; can you have someone look into historical references to a red dragon? I have something that I think I can use.”

“Lecter give you a –what’d you call it? A bone?”

“Of a sort,” Will said distractedly. He turned the car over and pulled away, heading towards the hotel. He left behind the smoker and the unhappy couple, although he couldn’t leave behind Lounds’ words and her knowing sneer. He took those with him to wrestle with later. “He’s transforming, Jack. He’s not killing, he’s becoming.”

“Becoming what?”

“The Red Dragon.”

-

He sent a message to Jack to forgo someone finding the ties to different red dragons because a quick search on google gave him exactly what he needed:

The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun

William Blake was the artist, and Will stared at the photos online for a long time, something funny twisting and constricting in his chest. He chewed on the pen cap he’d absconded with from the FBI. He thought of Freddie and slopped coffee all over the saucer by his laptop, flickers of angry embers occasionally lighting up at the thought of her smug, unruffled face.

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to

devour her child as soon as it was born," he murmured. He blew on the coffee, took a sip, and grimaced; he'd added too many coffee grounds. Some got through the filter and stuck to his tongue.

Soul Stealer probably didn't like his name written like that in the news, seeing as how he saw himself as the Great Red Dragon instead. Rather, that he was Becoming the Great Red Dragon.

He needed to see it in person. He needed to walk in Soul Stealer's shoes, see what he first saw that made him think as he did. Another quick search showed that one of the watercolors was held at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, while two were in DC and another in Pennsylvania.

He called Jack to make sure they'd let him in to see it privately, then paced in the room, rocking from heel to toe when he reached the wall before turning and pacing back. He considered calling Molly, but after his close brush with Lecter earlier in the day, he felt that it was best if he didn't. She didn't deserve that. What had he told Beverly? It was a choice to choose the soulmate? What a load of shit. That, or he was weak.

Better yet, he was weak. If Saul left Beverly, it was because he was an ass hole. If Will kept lying to Molly, it as because he was an ass hole. Fair was fair. There was no one better at self deprecation than Will Graham.

He lay in bed for a long time, staring at the ceiling and thinking about the woman clothed in sun. He wondered if Soul Stealer thought that the women he 'changed' were being elevated to a place in heaven much like that, or if in his Becoming, they were being stolen away to hell.

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Brooklyn Museum of Art boasted a glorious fan of stairs where people liked to pose for wedding photos, homecoming photos, and apparently soulmate bonding photos. The last was made painfully obvious when just inside the doors, satin streamers lined floor to ceiling with 'One Hundred Years of Souls' emblazoned along their fronts. At the desk, a cheery receptionist greeted him with two baby blues, one of them two shades lighter than the other.

"Are you here for One Hundred Years of Souls?" she asked happily. Just behind her, a tour guide was herding a small group of couples across the rich marbled floor, each one paired off with their matching eyes, and mouths wide with anticipation. He grimaced at the display, making money off of chemical pairings. It was about as sickening as Valentine's Day to him, taking something that was, at best, a cringe-inducing attempt at romance and mass marketing it for the sake of profit.

"I'm Dr. Will Graham," he said, forcing himself to look away from the group, "and I'm here to see-"

"Oh, right, right; I have a note here for you. Let me just-" she rolled about behind the desk, gathering a pamphlet and a visitor's pass up in a neat bundle, passing it back to him. "There we are. Mr. Wessler will see you downstairs."

“Thank you.”

“If you have time after, Dr. Graham, you should really see the exhibit. It just launched last week, and it’s amazing. They even study soulmate violence depicted in the art, and it’s just…wow. Wow. Donna Smith’s work from the 60’s is featured, and so is the Burning Times for soulmates in Europe. It's just...wow.”

“Wow,” Will echoed.

It was cooler going into the basement, and if Mr. Wessler was a fan of One Hundred Years of Souls, he said nothing about it. For that, Will was glad. When the door dinged and opened to a room of muted colors and low lights, he stepped out and looked around for the director that told Jack they’d discuss the artwork with him.

The back of his neck prickled at the silence. Uneasily, he walked around the corner to rows upon rows of tables, but there was no director; just a measly binder laid out with a bare page.

Will stared down at the bare page, the notation at the bottom boasting *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun, William Blake, watercolors.* There was no watercolor there, though; it was a blank page with a dour light on it, and when there was the distinct sound of a body hitting the floor, he turned and ran to the elevator, pulse spasming.

He never reached it.

Strong, capable hands lifted Will and launched him back, sending him flying into one of the tables where he flipped and fell to the other side on his hands and knees, wheezing out a breath. He had the disorienting feeling of being lifted by the back of his jacket, and he was thrown again, slamming into the pole in the center of the room, cracking the back of his head against it. It felt much like an egg cracking against the crown of his skull –a warm pain oozed and slithered down his neck and spine, dots dancing before his eyes. When the spots cleared, the visage of a man stuttered towards him, first to one side, then another. Out of the corner of his eye, Will dazedly noted the security guard slumped to the floor.

“Who-” he managed to slur, but the man’s hands were around his neck, squeezing. In his entire life, Will Graham had only been choked once before, much against his will. It’d been unpleasant then, and when thumbs dug into his windpipe, he decided that it was just as unpleasant now. He gasped in a short breath and swung his arms around, letting momentum slam his forearms into the man’s elbows, releasing his throat. He didn’t hesitate, rearing forward and head-butting him, a snarl of anger rippling past his lips.

At the sound and the assault, the man stumbled back, surprised. He had short, cropped blonde hair, and two dazed brown eyes blinked wildly, panicked. Cornered. An animal that didn’t know where to go. When Will’s watering eyes fell to the barely noticeable cleft pallet, blood trickling at the corner of his lip, the man bolted, racing towards the elevator. When the ringing in Will’s ears faded, he followed, elbows pumping and breath ripping from him. He had the dragon.

He slammed into the elevator as it closed, and he rolled with the force of his momentum, making his way to the stairs and climbing them, every inch of him screaming to *go, go, go*, that there wasn't time to pause, wasn't time to think, because Soul Stealer was right there and he'd taken the fucking painting with him.

When he reached the top, he kicked the door open and raced towards the elevator. His heart stopped, stuttered, then started again. The elevator sat wide open, and the man was nowhere in sight.

"Sir? Is everything okay?" The front desk woman hurried over to him, concerned, and she reached to his collar, wiping at it. Fingers came away red, and he stared down at her hand, stained with his failure.

"Call the police," he demanded hoarsely, fat fingers fumbling for his phone. "Tell them the Soul Stealer was here."

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One Hundred Years of Souls was closed for the day, and Jack Crawford had the place on lockdown. The receptionist hadn't recalled the man running from the elevators, but enough cameras were there to give them a good shot of just how he'd gotten away. He'd come out of the elevator, calm, then booked through the crowd the moment he was outside, using shoulders as ways to propel himself far ahead of Will. He'd had the unfortunate advantage of not having his head knocked in with a dizzying effect. They did get his spit, though; they also got his blood.

Will sat at the back of an ambulance, letting them get a good look at his head for the umpteenth time. It was a flesh wound, but it was tender to the touch, and he resisted the urge to snap and grumble as they cleaned the blood out of his hair.

"I really urge you to go and get a scan," the paramedic said.

"It's fine," Will retorted.

"He was here," Jack ground out, ignoring the exasperated glance the paramedic sent his way. "He was here, and he got away."

His pacing made Will want to pace. His toe tapped in time with Jack's about-faces as he said, "He ate the picture."

"He *ate* it?"

"Wessler was only out for a minute, but he got the footage pulled up before you got here. He knocked out the director, Mrs. Stunpike, and he ate the painting."

"I wonder how much that dinner cost?" Beverly asked. She hovered in front of Will, dabbing at the place on his head that'd made contact with the killer's mouth. When he realized that it was wet from spit and a bit of blood, having gotten a good crack at him, he left

it well enough alone until she could get her hands on it. Once they confirmed the DNA match, the only thing left would be to catch the bastard.

"Enough that he didn't leave a tip," Zeller quipped.

"The tip was not to get in his way when he's trying to make a getaway," Price said brightly. A pause. "Sorry, Graham."

"Did you look up Dolarhyde?" Will asked, ignoring Price.

"See, now that's the problem," Beverly began, and Jack swore under his breath. He walked back over to Will and planted his hands on his hips. Will peeked up at his subtly mismatched eyes expectantly, then focused on the grey by his temple.

"He was dead," Jack said curtly.

"Dead." Will rolled his bottom lip in, wet it, and shook his head. The words didn't sit right. Dead was too easy a failure. People like Soul Stealer didn't just *die*. Dying was easy. Dying was the easy way out. He resisted the urge to rub the aching scar tissue to the side of his neck.

"Dead, deceased in a fire a year or so ago. We found his wife, Reba, and she said he had some kind of psychotic break, shot himself in the head, and burnt the house down with her in it."

"No," Will said, and he shook his head.

"Well, yes, then we looked up his photo to confirm, and you know what we saw, Will?"

Ah, there it was. When the paramedic left him with a pain killer and a bandaged head, he rolled the plastic bottle about in his hands and nodded, already knowing.

"You saw the man that ate the painting."

"We saw the man that ate the painting," Jack affirmed. His lips sucked in tight, like he'd tasted a bad lemon. "He faked his death."

"The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun is a revelations reference," Beverly said, and Will bobbed his head, agreeing with that too.

"He should have referenced Lazarus instead," Price joked.

"I wonder why he didn't take her eyes," said Will thoughtfully. After a thought, it dawned on him. "A one-sided soulmate?"

"She's blind, so we'd have to run tests to tell," Beverly said. "Even with a soulmate connection, a blind eye doesn't change color."

“She’d have known he was alive if it was a full connection. We should test it to see if she’s helping him at all.” Even saying it, though, it didn’t sit right with Will. He took a long gulp of water, crushing the plastic in his hand as he did. He capped it and let it keep a distorted, crumpled shape and sloshed the water around idly. “He loves her.”

“Bad way of showing it,” Jack snapped.

“Good way of showing it,” Will disagreed. “He thought they were meant to be, but he didn’t *feel* her. He connected to her, but his tasteless thoughts didn’t resonate in her. He knew she was too good, so he left to save her from him. That’s why he longed for a soulmate, even though he was listed as having a soulmate.”

“You know that just by getting smacked around by him?” Zeller wondered.

“He went to Lecter for therapy for a short while. He wanted a connection, and he wondered what it’d take for someone to see him the way he wanted to be seen. Great. Powerful. Capable.” Will cast Zeller a dark look. His head hurt too damn bad for him to have to explain himself. “He’s got a cleft pallet and he’s been presumed dead for a few years.”

“So he’s going to be hard to find,” Jack mused. “He knows how to hide. Why’d he eat the painting?”

“Maybe to take its power?” Beverly suggested. “Some people believe ingesting something you long for will bring it to you. Power, intelligence, perseverance…”

“He’s pumping himself up for the next attack,” Will said. “I don’t know if he’s going to last the month until he strikes again.” As an afterthought, “He’ll look me up to see who he was throwing around down there. He’ll know we’re close.”

“I want to know how you were able to time that so well, Will,” Jack said. “I’m trying to keep you out of the frontlines, and somehow you find your way back in all over again. You’re a psychiatrist, not an FBI agent.”

“It’s a flesh wound,” Will assured him. The throbbing in his skull disagreed, but he didn’t want to worry anyone. He thought about Molly fussing over it, cotton swab mopping up the worst of it. She’d try and ice it, and he’d complain about the cold.

Reba would have probably done the same for Francis Dolarhyde. In the end, he left because he loved her. Maybe he was a better man than Will. Dolarhyde would leave for love, Beverly would stay for love, and Will wasn’t quite sure what the hell he was going to do.

“He’s not Francis Dolarhyde anymore,” Will realized after a moment, drumming fingers on the water bottle. “He killed him in the house as it burned down. In his head, he’s the Red Dragon now.”

“If this is giving you flashbacks to-”

“It’s *fine*,” he snapped, and he stood up from the ambulance, stuffing his hands into his pockets. He’d let the paramedic recycle the bottle rather than he waste it in a rubbish bin.

In his guts, a kernel of concern flickered distractingly, and he gritted his teeth. Hannibal had felt his wound as it happened, felt the pain as though it were his own. *Good.* “I’m going to drive back to Baltimore. Now that we know who it is, I think Lecter will open up a bit more.”

“I think you should take the rest of the day off,” Jack said, and Will brushed past him, shaking his head.

“Red Dragon doesn’t sleep, neither do I,” he said.

-

"You feeling okay, Dr. Graham?" Matthew asked when he arrived at the BSHCI. Will nodded, fumbling with his keys and stuffing them into his jacket. Another round of painkillers and water left his head a minor nuisance rather than a true pain.

"Peachy."

Matthew Brown nodded, leading him down the steps towards maximum, his eyes shifting to the side every now and again to note the bandage on his head. Will felt his concern like a bristle brush on a sunburn. He had two matching green eyes. "You look like you should be in a hospital."

"After this, I'll probably head to one," Will lied. He'd probably go to the hotel, in truth. Rage a little. Try not to drink. Maybe call Molly. Maybe not.

"You do that," Matthew urged, and he waved the security guard to open the doors. "We wouldn't want anything to happen to you, if you don't mind my saying so."

Will minded him saying so, but he wouldn't say that. Matthew was only speaking out of concern, and a polite concern as that.

Lecter was pretending to nap when Will sat down in the chair, and he took that time to take a breath. The pain killers took most of the throbbing ache away, but standing left him feeling dizzy, woozy. He hadn’t been handled like that in a long time, and he didn’t like how slow he’d been to react. The last time he’d gotten physical with a psychopath, he’d been far more limber.

“You should have your brain scanned to ensure that everything is alright,” Lecter drawled, eyes closed. His hands were clasped behind his head, legs crossed at the ankles. It was a casual, comfortable state, and the suddenness of his voice made Will jump slightly, looking up from the table leg that he’d been focusing on rather than the feeling of Red Dragon throwing him across a table.

“It’s fine.”

“Who handled you so roughly, Will?”

“You know exactly who,” he snapped, rubbing his eye. He looked from Lecter’s elegant repose to the drawings on the wall.

“The Great Red Dragon,” Lecter murmured, and he sat up, turning on the cot to face the wall rather than look at Will. Will watched his hands grip the edge of the bed, tight. “You saw him, then.”

“He saw me first.”

“Do you know what he’s referencing when he calls himself that?” Lecter looked at him, the edges of his lips curled ever-so-slightly.

“It was a three hour drive there, and a three hour drive back from Blake’s artwork” Will said, ignoring the expression of subtle delight. “Three hours back, and I thought to myself, ‘that timing was too good. Somehow, he knew I’d be there, and Soul Stealer tried to be there first, before me. To size me up. To eat me.’”

“Does it still hurt?” Lecter wondered.

“Then I thought, ‘I bet Dr. Lecter found a way to warn him, and he wanted to see what I’d do when I saw him face-to-face.’”

“And what did you do?”

“I thought, ‘he set me up to potentially get killed.’”

“Did you look into his eyes and see your own reflected back?” Lecter stood and crossed to the bars, head cocked to the side.

“I wondered, ‘why in the hell would he do that?’” Will ignored him, biting his thumb idly as he stared at the hip of his jumpsuit. “Then I thought, ‘because he wanted to see what would happen. He was curious.’”

“Are you very angry with me, Will?” Hannibal asked kindly.

“…No,” Will admitted. “But I’d been wondering about us before; I thought about Molly, and I thought about her forgiving me for being connected to you. She would because she’s better than me.”

“That lends itself the thought that perhaps that’s why you’re not soulmates,” said Hannibal gravely.

“Yeah,” Will agreed, nodding. He looked to the slip-on shoes Hannibal wore because no one was stupid enough to give him Velcro, what with the plastic tabs. “Yeah, she’s better than me. But I thought, maybe I can make the soulmate connection work because separation is cruel and unusual punishment in some states, and I didn’t want to give you a leg up in the justice system. I visit regularly, and it keeps things calm. I thought, maybe this will work.

“I don’t think I care much about that anymore. Baltimore doesn’t have the Cruel and Unusual Punishment Clause that most other states have for soulmates whose partner refuses to visit them in prison. It was overturned four years ago.”

Will spoke with a flat, toneless voice, like he'd recited the words several times until the sting fell out of them. Somehow, the lack of emotion was more fitting, since he saw the subtle ways that it took effect on Hannibal's face. His lips thinned, compressed tightly. The fine lines near his eyes deepened, the expression stiffening. It wasn't Jack Crawford's puckered face at the thought of Soul Stealer getting away, but it was the exact reaction Will had been hoping for as he drove back from Brooklyn, white-knuckled as he gripped the steering wheel and took deep, calming breaths.

"You plan on catching your killer and returning to your Molly as a white knight?" Hannibal asked, a dark expression crossing his face.

"I plan on going back to Molly and leaving you behind," Will said amiably.

"A dangerous threat, Will," Hannibal warned him.

"See, I was thinking about you, and you're right, Hannibal. We have a lot in common." Clearly. Will gritted his teeth. "The difference between you and me is our willingness to commit violence."

"Do you think you're above that curiosity, dear Will?" Hannibal asked lightly. The tone didn't match the expression on his face. When Will shifted in his chair, his predatory eyes tracked the movement.

"No, not at all. I'm curious to see just how my absence affects you. I'm curious what you'll do."

"Don't you fear how I'll find a way to hurt you again?"

"No." Will shrugged. "You knew I'd come here. You knew, so you endured feeling my pain because you'd see me and be reassured. Soulmate connections receive emotional comfort in a variety of ways: auditory, visually, and tactilely mainly. Any of these have the capacity to release endorphins, and that's how you could handle the feeling of the back of your head cracking against concrete.

"What happens when I don't come back, though? As wonderful as the feeling of endorphins released can be, there are other chemicals released when the feeling of pain is not eased through any of those three senses. Just like endorphins can cause pleasure, the chemical imbalance of serotonin, dopamine, and epinephrine are just as potent."

"You think you're going to give me anxiety if I hurt you at a distance?" Hannibal's lip curled derisively.

"No, I *know* that. Simple science." Will shrugged, drumming his fingers along his leg. "You think, 'I'll get used to it'. But unlike endorphins, which create a rush that you crave as it abates, the imbalance that causes the anxiety doesn't abate. Time doesn't take away the sting. If anything, it grows."

"Then what is our difference in our willingness to commit violence, dear Will?"

“I’ve had to reconcile myself with the feeling I get in hurting people, my ability to understand and commit violence,” Will said, standing up. He walked over to the bars, just far enough away that if Lecter reached, he couldn’t get a hold of him. “I know the dark parts of myself, which is why I don’t want anyone else digging around in my mind.”

“And?”

“I’ve come to the understanding that doing something bad to bad people feels really, *really* good,” Will whispered to him. “While you see the world as a slaughterhouse, I see people like you, and I relish in just how good it’d be to hurt you.”

Silence. In the distance between them, something curled and twisted, unpleasant but wonderful in of itself. Will looked up to Lecter’s mismatched eyes, and he grinned, a snarling, nasty expression that made his eyes narrow wolfishly. Hannibal looked a breath away from throwing himself against the bars to haul Will close. He looked a breath away from eating him. He looked a breath away from fucking him.

Will moved, and he was right against the bars, hand reaching to grasp Hannibal’s chin tightly, tugging him closer. Hannibal didn’t fight the motion, and there was a small thread of surprise when he instead took a deliberate step to Will, allowing him to grip his face so roughly, so unkindly. His eyes flashed with something akin to pleasure.

“You’re so sly, but so am I,” Will murmured, taunting. “Don't mistake my kindness up to this point as weakness. Don’t ever fuck with me like that again, Hannibal.” His thumb dragged against Hannibal’s bottom lip roughly, fingers curling along the stubble of his jaw. “Like I said before: I’d kill myself if it meant you suffered.”

“In this moment, I find you at your most beautiful,” Hannibal murmured, and he nipped the tip of his finger, almost hard enough to break skin. If Will didn’t know any better, he’d have called it flirtatious, playful. “I wonder how Molly would see you.”

Will didn’t answer, leaving the statement suspended in the air like the clouds of smoke he’d watched the man puff away at the day before, the discontent ruminating and spreading. The difference was, when the heavy door slammed shut behind him, the poison stayed on the other side of the door.

More or less.

Chapter End Notes

Freddie Lounds is like...the best outside antagonist ever. I flipping love to hate her.

Also, within about 24 hours I'm going to have the best news ever to share with you guys, so stay tuned! As always, thank you so much for your feedback, your amazing comments, posts on tumblr as well as here, and your ability to inspire me so much with

your energy that I'm writing like I think I've never written before. Idk where this is coming from on my end, but I don't want it to stop.

Song Inspiration: "The Wolf" by Phildel

Those Lovely Baby Blues

Chapter Notes

> Trigger warning: there is a suicide mention/depressive episode about halfway through the chapter. Suicide is a serious topic and in my writing I do not use it lightly. It is crucial with the character though, so I hope that it has been conveyed respectfully and does not trigger anyone reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 8:

Reba Dolarhyde-McClane had rich, sepia brown skin and a smile like a 100-watt bulb. Her matching brown eyes fixed where she heard the voice come from, and if Will hadn't known better, he'd have sworn she could see right through him. Perhaps, being blind, she saw better than most.

Not enough, though. Not enough to see Francis Dolarhyde.

"He'd always been reclusive at work, but that suited me fine. People sometimes were rude to him, but he was always kind to me, always nice," she said. She sat in her seat across from Jack and next to Will, hands clasped on her knees. "He never coddled me for being blind the way a lot of people do. He always respected my independence."

"How long did he go to Dr. Lecter?" Jack asked. Will wasn't supposed to ask anything, merely observe.

"About six months, and he said he'd gotten better. After Dr. Lecter was imprisoned, he took it pretty hard. He tried another therapist, but that fell through, then he said he'd be okay." Her teeth bit over her bottom lip. "…I thought everything was okay."

"What happened the night that he…lost control?"

Tactful, Jack. Will chewed on a hangnail and slumped lower in his chair, watching her. He felt Lecter's indignation and mild unease like an ill-fitting suit. Four days strong without him. Will liked to pretend that he was doing just fine, like he didn't wake sporadically and have to run himself to exhaustion on the treadmill at the hotel at 2 AM just to fucking sleep.

"He wanted to be intimate." She said 'intimate' like she'd had to practice the sound of it not feeling so intimate to say in front of strangers. "I sat on the bed, but he left the room, and when he came back, it felt wrong."

"Wrong?"

"Serious. Dark. I asked what was wrong, and I smelled the gasoline…he said he had to. He loved me, but he had to. Then…" She nodded to herself, thinking of the timeline, "then the room went up, and a gunshot. I went to him, but he…his face was…"

She stopped, hands clenched. Will tasted sorrow on the tip of his tongue, followed by a hint of bitterness.

"I got out. I got to the neighbors, and they helped me call the police for a fire truck. It was all gone, though, all of it…" She sighed, composing herself. Reba had the poise of a Michelangelo painting, the grace of an angel. Will envied Dolarhyde's time spent with her. "I miss him. He was troubled, but he was…he was so sweet. So gentle."

Will and Jack exchanged a glance, and Will nodded. She wasn't lying.

"Did he ever mention his eyes changing color, Ms. Dolarhyde-McClane?" Jack asked.

"…His eyes?"

"His eyes were different shades of brown."

She didn't know what to say to that, and Will felt the befuddlement, the confusion. That they would bother to tell her, after all this time…

"What's that mean for me?" she asked.

"We ran a test, and the shades of brown in the left eye correspond to a 92.4% match of the color of your intermediate family members whose eyes are on record due to filing their soulmate eye color," Will said, speaking up. Reba looked to him, and it pierced him in the chest. "We believe he had a partial soulmate bond with you."

"Why are you telling me this?"

Jack waved a hand sharply in his direction, but Will ignored it. He leaned closer to her, studying the way her lips quivered, her hands fluttering to the necklace at her neck before falling back to her lap. She knew. She *knew*.

"You knew."

"…He's not dead, is he?" she asked, a mere whisper.

"He's not," Will said, "but he loved you enough to leave you. He loved you enough that when he started talking about red dragons and you got scared, he let you think he was dead rather than drag you into the mire he'd made for himself."

"Will," Jack warned.

"He said he was going to be *okay*," Reba suddenly cried, and she covered her mouth with her hand, like she could hold back the words she'd kept to herself for so long. Like a wave cresting the breakers, tears began to fall, and she buried her face in her hands, sobbing soundlessly.

Will leaned back into his chair and stared at the desk leg. His stomach settled a little, now that the truth was out in the air, ugly in its reality. In that moment, Jack both loved and hated him.

-

Molly called him while he was getting lunch, and he sat outside, picking at a questionably soggy sandwich. Soulmates had half-off prices on Saturdays at the sub shop, but that hadn't been enough for him to pull one of the contacts from his eyes. For what he'd paid for too much mayo, he wondered idly if he should have just bit the bullet.

"You should have told me, Will," she said when he picked up. There was as much accusation in her voice as there was worry.

"Maybe," he agreed. Then, "No, probably not."

"Have you been to a doctor?"

"Yes," he lied. Then, "No, no I haven't."

"Will," she admonished. His ears grew hot at the lie, and he chewed morosely on the bread, gritting his teeth against the texture. If that's how she sounded when he lied about a doctor, he wondered the tone she'd take when he finally showed her his eyes.

What did you do to your eyes, Will?

"I'm fine, Molly."

"Is he going to try and kill you once he knows who you are?" she asked.

"Maybe," Will admitted. "I'll have people on me. SWAT."

"They're calling him Red Dragon in the news now, Will. Did he really eat that painting?"

Will laughed and looked up at the sky. Something inside of him was tearing, and he coughed at the shortness of breath. "Yeah, yeah he did."

Silence. Will listened to her breathe as he chewed his dismally awful sandwich, and he wondered just what she'd say if he begged her to come visit. He thought of Red Dragon seeing her with him, though, and the thought was struck from his mind. He thought of Reba telling them everything she knew, how he'd found the painting one day by coincidence and began obsessing over it. How he'd wake her in the night sometimes, growling into a mirror in the upstairs spare bedroom. Guttural. Animalistic. He loved her, therefore he left her.

"I miss you," he said, desperate. "You haven't mentioned the news casters once."

"Their eyes haven't changed," she assured him. "Not since the new guy."

"Good, good."

“Do you think about Garrett Jacob Hobbs a lot, now that you’re up there and alone?” she asked.

“I do.” Molly was the only one to be able to get away with asking that, and she knew it. He wondered if Alana had called her.

“I want you to come back down here. Forget what I said about helping people, I’m scared for you, Will.”

“Oh, Molly,” he sighed. “I think it’s too late for that.”

“Fuck Jack Crawford, just come back home. You want to come home, don’t you? Aren’t you already tired of this? You were tired before it even began.”

“My darling Molly,” he murmured to her. “I wish that I could. I really, really do. We’d get the boat and go along the coast, getting fat off of beer and mangos.”

“You hate mangos.”

“I’d eat a thousand mangos if you asked me to,” he vowed.

Another prolonged silence. He thought about Reba crying in Jack Crawford’s office, the stench of despair. She’d mourned Francis Dolaryhyde, but now she feared the Red Dragon like everyone else did. Jack promised to relocate her, that way she’d be safe in case she was the final product of his ‘transformation’. He wondered if in Reba’s dreams, she saw Red Dragon devouring her the same way Will did.

“Please be safe, darling,” she said. She’d never called him that before. Stud, dear, honey-bunches, and sometimes William, but not darling. He didn’t care for it. Too many new names; Red Dragon, darling, dear Will, my Will.

“I told you,” he said, and somehow she knew.

“You did,” she agreed. “You said you’d be different, and god dammit if you weren’t right.”

-

Will avoided the alcohol cabinet out of a stubborn need. He paced his room that evening, thought about Hannibal, cursed himself. When it began to rain, smeared images of a dark city with occasional bursts of light, he slumped into his chair and stared at the image of the Red Dragon next to *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun*, trying to blend the two together. In the picture of Red Dragon, his cleft pallet was less noticeable due to the turn of his head, like he was used to trying to hide it. He didn’t look at the camera. Whoever had taken the photo, they’d done it against his will.

“I’m trying to see you,” Will said to him glumly. “Beneath the pixels, the blood, the mirrors, the photos, the…textbook analysis. One part of a whole that never finished, and you’re trying to fill in the pieces.

“How’d you talk to Hannibal Lecter in prison? How'd you get past the screening of letters? What’d you say that made him so delighted to pit you against me? Is that it? Is it a competition?”

Red Dragon didn’t say anything in return. Will laid his head on the small desk, staring sideways out of the window as the rain fell, mocking him with its steady pace. He wished he could be so steady. With every flash of light that leapt across the sky, he wished he could be so steady, able to catch the guy and keep the girl in the end.

-

He got a call early in the morning, a few days later, and he supposed he should get used to running on only a few hours of sleep. Seven days without Hannibal. Seven days with sleepless nights. He glared at the shadows under his eyes, and he resented them, resented the bastard that’d given them to him.

“Dr. Graham, there’s something of urgency that I think you should see here,” Dr. Chilton said. “I’ve already called Jack Crawford, and he’s on his way.”

Will didn’t realize he was wearing the same clothes as the day before until he walked into the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane –Jack’s facial expression made it painfully apparent. He looked down at his plaid shirt, brushed off a few crumbs from an English muffin, and followed Chilton into his office. Still two brown eyes.

“We were doing our cell-to-cell inspections, as we normally do, when Barney found this in Hannibal Lecter’s cell, wadded up inside of a roll of toilet paper.”

On the table, written in a short, neat script, was a letter.

“Is that toilet paper?” Jack asked, eyebrows lifted.

“Yes, very biodegradable from the feel of it. Not ours,” Chilton said with a sniff. He looked from the two-ply and fixed Will with a stare that he avoided. “Someone has been writing your ‘witness’ little love notes, Dr. Graham.”

My dear Dr. Lecter,

I wanted to tell you how happy I am that you’ve taken an interest in me, after all this time. I thought I was nothing more than a blip in your timeline, a mere shadow within the memories you no doubt hold dear from the time when you were free to do as you wished and conquer your small portion of the world.

When I heard from you, I thought, dare I? Of course I dare. It is of no consequence the body in which I am bound to, now, for this shell is not important –what is important is what I am <u>becomin</u>g, and that is of greatness. You of all understand the power of transformation.

I keep cutouts of you whenever you are in the press. We have a lot in common, you and I, from our ways to the unfair names they sling at us. They call me Soul Stealer, like a

thief in the night rather than a creator. I thought of you seeing such crude attempts at naming, but I know it is of little consequence to you. You who was also slurred in the newspapers, first Chesapeake Ripper, then Hannibal the Cannibal…

Dr. Will Graham interests me. He's not very handsome, but there is something purposeful about him, even as I held him by the throat. He was not afraid as he looked at me. There was no fear in his eyes as he snarled. Perhaps he is a dragon, too.

How you managed to warn me of his scent on my artistic depiction gave me the time to do as I will; I hold myself indebted. Perhaps one day we will meet, and I will share with you the ways that I am utterly grateful to you.

Though the papers of this letter are insufficient, I thought it best under the circumstances, should you need to eat it. Your own note was on far better cardstock, something smacking of connections beyond your cell. I applaud your grace and wit, even as I learn from and ascend beyond it.

Until then, I remain your,

-Avid Fan

There were places ripped out, small spots where bits had been removed. Will had to resist reaching out to touch it, get a feel for the texture of the paper Red Dragon had so lovingly leaned over. He wondered if the smell of him was still ingrained in the fibers. Probably not.

He could hear him, though. In person, his speech would be slurred, rough. On paper, no matter the quality, his eloquence was far beyond the physical shell he thought himself doomed to.

"He bears screams like a sculptor bears dust from the beaten stone," Will said quietly.

"What?" Chilton said, a curt burst of noise. Jack waved at him to be quiet, and Will found himself wandering over to the window, rubbing the sleep from his yawning mouth. Hannibal was close. Hannibal was so close, but not close enough. If anything, Red Dragon was closer. He wanted neither one of them close, but he needed both of them to be close.

"Is that what you get from this, Will?" Jack asked.

"Avid fan, indeed," he muttered, staring out at the early morning. It already looked like midday due to the brightness, and he squinted at the wraparound parking lot at the front entrance. "He knew what Lecter was, even as he saw him for treatment. He knows Lecter relates to him."

"Lecter reached out to him first," Jack said.

"He knows we are not the sum of our parts. We are light, dust, spirit, the many parts of a whole that furthers his growth. His transformation." Will fiddled with the blinds, knotting and re-knotting the pull-string. Red Dragon thought he was a dragon, too. Will noted

the fact that he said *a* dragon, not a *great* dragon. One of potential many, but he was *The*, and Will was *a.*

Chilton opened his mouth, and Jack lifted a hand to silence him, staring at Will. "How's he going to finish his transformation, Will?" he asked gently.

"Hannibal Lecter would be the final death. Beautiful. Glorious. Like John the Baptist taking a knee when Jesus waded into the water." Will glanced to an orderly stepping outside to meet someone pulling up. "Did you read it? 'Even as I learn from and ascend beyond it.'"

"How did he get the correspondence out?" Jack asked.

"Ask Chilton's orderlies, Jack," Will said with a snort. He abruptly dropped the pull-string and gave him a wan glance. "Enough money or persuasion, and he'd be able to get whatever letter out wherever he needed it to go."

-

Matthew Brown was the easiest catch Will ever had while consulting with the FBI. Under the pressure of Jack, Will, and an indignant Chilton, he cracked and admitted to sending out letters unscreened for not only Lecter, but other inmates, too.

The last one confused him, though, he admitted. Lecter had it sent to the newspaper, Tattler, as a personal ad. It ran just yesterday, he said, an odd request for meeting a single young lady by the name of Molly.

Will Graham had to be held by back by Jack and Chilton both, fist halfway to Matthew Brown's face before they hauled him out of the room. It took a while for him to realize, pacing the hall, that the ragged, guttural wheezing was coming from him and not the smoking, fiery maw of a dragon.

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"Molly, my Molly, please answer the phone. If you get this, call 907-XXX-XXXX immediately. Find a safe space to hide in until they call back and give you further instructions. You know where I put the gun; find it and put one in the chamber, like we practiced. Please tell me you've still been practicing.

"I'm so sorry…my Molly, I'm so sorry. I love you."

-

They were on a plane to Florida when Jack got a call from one of the guys at HQ. It was a skip code, and a rather decently complicated one at that.

'Save yourself, kill Molly –Graham's love," Jack said. Will paced the length of the jet, turned around, eyed the liquor cabinet. Told himself no.

When they got another call that Molly had crashed a car into the hospital parking lot before falling out of the driver's seat, unresponsive, he broke down and made himself a

strong, strong drink. Three years sober, indeed.

-

He woke to someone finger-combing the back of his head, mindful of the rather large, ugly scab at the crown. Will lifted his head blearily, and at Molly's pained, drawn face, pale but very much alive, he grabbed her hand and wept.

-

"Those aren't your eyes," were the first words out of her mouth to him.

"No," he said hoarsely. She didn't draw away from him, stuck as she was with a gunshot wound to the shoulder. She let him hold her hand and kiss it, pressing his face to her palm with a need border-lining on desperation.

"What's underneath those eyes, Will?" she asked him. "What colors am I going to see?"

"One blue," he said, and he dropped his gaze to the fine lines along her palm. He traced her life line, then the heart line. "The other's maroon."

"Do I want to know who it belongs to?"

"No…no, you really, really don't."

-

In his dreams, he took out both of his eyes and tried to crush them, a raging grief that took the breath from him, left him gasping for air that would not come. Before he could destroy them, someone reached out and took them from him. They held regret and sorrow with equal weight, and their kisses tasted like rotting flesh.

-

Once she was well enough to be moved, Jack had her taken to a safe house with a round-the-clock guard. Will would have thought about going with her, but the need to see Red Dragon dead burned him with such a fury that he didn't offer to go. The look she gave him, equal parts betrayal and equal parts unease at his mismatched eyes was enough to send him after Jack's heel like a well-trained dog to the master's boot. She didn't tell Jack about his eyes. He didn't tell her about Hannibal. Thankfully, with her injuries, she didn't ask.

"I've got my best guys on her, Will. Molly's going to be okay," he assured him. "She outsmarted the bastard. He tried to get her, and she got away."

"He outsmarted us," Will said after a prolonged pause. "Lecter outsmarted us."

He felt a disquieted, uncertain sort of thing, and he wasn't sure if it was Lecter's pain at the distance, or if there was something more to it than that. He relished in the way that his skin burned, the way that he felt small cracks in the shell around him. Every time the pulsing

pain faded, then returned, he reminded himself that if he was hurting, Lecter was, too. In the hotel room before they flew back to Baltimore, he drew idle designs with his finger on the table beside a glass of whiskey and his gun, staring for a long, long time. Only the burning need to see Red Dragon dead keeping him from doing something permanently destructive.

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Chilton didn't want to let Will see Hannibal; he said it wasn't wise, what with the way he'd been able to put people in legitimate danger, even while incarcerated. It wasn't until Will leaned over the desk at him, contacts burning holes into him, that his stubbornness was quelled and he relented.

"He almost killed Molly," he said, a low growl. "I'm owed some answers."

"Perhaps he supposes that one-sided soulmate relations are enough for him to claim you," Chilton said, leading him towards maximum. He tone was petulant, even as he relented.

Will didn't reply.

He let Barney set up the partitions and the chair alone, his skin on fire. It'd been three weeks, and the time away burned, blistered, and reeked of bruises that sunk too deep. He reveled in the pain. It was his bedmate, his food and his water. He reveled in the destructive thoughts it lent him, in the bleak way that it made him stare at a wall for minutes that stretched to hours until he realized just how much time had passed, uncaring in the zombie-like manner that it lent him. Molly almost died because of him. Molly almost died because of his games. Molly almost died because of Hannibal-Fucking-Lecter.

"Poor Dr. Graham," Gideon said. He leaned against the bars of his cell, and if not for the nonchalant swing to his arm that hung, he'd have seemed truly piteous. "Word gets around quick."

"Does it?"

"Matthew Brown; fired for smuggling contraband inside of these walls and willfully endangering the life of a person," he said, ticking the acts off on his fingers. "Compromising a current investigation, impeding justice, and accessory to attempted murder. Quite the little naughty blend of illegal behaviors for an orderly of such a prestigious place as this, don't you think?"

"Do you think so?" Will wondered. "You sound like you're not surprised."

"Oh, I'm really, really *not*, Dr. Graham," Gideon said. He huffed a short laugh, lip quirking into a smile. "The orderlies here call this row the deadly crazies, but it's here that they walk, isn't it? Wouldn't one of us, with practice, learn to walk as they do? Talk as they do?"

"Do you think he's like you then?"

“No, he’s far uglier, far less sophisticated.” Abel shook his head, deep in thought. When one came to him, his eyes lightened and he looked back to Will. “I will say, though; he often condescended to have small little chats with Dr. Lecter, much like you do. Whisper on the row is that he’s going to find himself back here, in a uniform like mine rather than a uniform like Barney’s.”

“Justice at its finest,” Will found himself saying.

Gideon liked that. A lot. “Irony, too. I do feel bad for your girlfriend, though.”

“That word got around too?”

“Oh, yes,” he said with a somber nod. “When I was a surgeon, I was informed that I had hands that were just nimble and quick enough to do what other surgeons couldn’t do. If I was at that hospital, I’d have ensured she was taken care of.”

“That’s honestly very kind of you, Dr. Gideon,” said Will. If he’d been at that hospital, Will would have shot him dead.

“I think it’s because you have the ability to be just as rude, just as dismissive to me as the orderlies around here, but you aren’t. You give politeness where politeness is due, Dr. Graham, and I think about things like that.” Gideon smiled, dragged a finger along one of the bars of his cell. “I think about politeness, about who is and isn’t kind, about the people that show kindness even when they don’t have to.”

“The world is nasty enough, I think; me being rude would just add to a problem.”

“The world is nasty enough,” Gideon echoed. “Yes, with people like Matthew Brown lurking about, profiting from your woes, the world is nasty enough. I’m glad there are upstanding individuals like you to offset it.”

“Dr. Graham?”

Will looked over to see Barney hovering by the partitions, like he’d been there for quite some time. Will cleared his throat, looked to Abel, then back to Barney.

“You have business to take care of, I think,” Abel said slyly. He moved away from the bars, settled down on his cot. “Thank you for the chat, Dr. Graham. Thank you for always being kind.”

“Have a good day, Dr. Gideon,” Will found himself saying. He nodded to Barney, resisted the urge to press down on the indignant impatience curdling inside of him.

“He’s awake,” Barney said as Will went to the partitions. Will nodded, already well aware of that.

When Barney left, he walked around the partition and stared at Hannibal, his vision going red.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for your constant support! Sorry this is a day later than normal, yesterday I had several friends graduate from WSU, so we basically were out from the moment I got off of work until...like 3 AM this morning. Thankfully there wasn't too much to edit with this guy, so if there's any comma splices or mistakes I apologize. :)

Song Inspiration: "Run" by Daughter

One Eye Green, One Seafoam Blue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 9:

He looked rough, if such a word could be assigned to him. It wasn't apparent in his finely combed hair, nor was it apparent in the jumpsuit adjusted just-so. No, things like that only lent him the appearance of bliss, of vacation rather than confinement. It was the set of his shoulders, the way his hands were tense at his sides rather than lax. It was the way his gaze dropped, unable to keep Will's accusing stare. His expression was grim, contrite, shadows under the hollows of his eyes. He stood close enough to the bars to kiss them.

"My Will," he said, the first to speak. He sounded regrettably weary, like sleep escaped his most desperate attempts. "You tried to warn me how acutely horrendous it'd feel to hurt you. You tried to tell me."

Will trembled, but he didn't move. He let the ache of the distance rest between them, agonizing. Enough pain had built up that sight alone couldn't nourish them. He had to focus on pushing away the anger, the need to wrap his hands around Hannibal's throat and end him. His heartbeat was in his eye, and it steadily pushed the red away with each beat until it merely flickered around the edges of his gaze rather than consuming it.

"Come here," Hannibal coaxed softly. "Not for me, but for you."

Will took one step, then another. When he reached him, he let out a warbling, uncertain breath of air, and Hannibal's arms were taut around him before he knew it, holding him as close as he was able, as tight as he dared. Will put his arms through the bars, and he clung to him, a soundless sob ripping from his lips as he pressed his face to his chest and closed his eyes tightly. The relief alone, his touch as soothing as a siren's call, was enough to undo him, even as he hated it.

"My poor Will," Hannibal murmured, and he lifted a hand to the back of his head, stroking his hair gently, tenderly. "You've gone through something horrible."

"I hate you," Will whispered against his chest. "I hate you so much."

"Do you wish to kill me?" Hannibal wondered. He dipped his head down to press a light, fleeting kiss to the curls on top of his head.

"Yes." A pause. "I'd use my bare hands," he added.

"I wouldn't recommend it. The myriad of emotions I've felt at your pain, at your horror and fear, I wouldn't wish upon you. If it is enough to unsettle me, I can only imagine what form of torment it would do to you and the mirrors abound in your mind."

He laid his cheek on top of Will's head and held him as close as the bars would allow, fingertips gliding along his spine like he could sooth the pain by touch alone. Perhaps he could; with each pass of his hand, the sensation of water rising far up over Will's head lessened until it felt like he was treading water rather than drowning in it. His heartbeat was steady, strong against his temple, and Will despised just how at ease it made him.

He'd counseled enough soulmates in abusive relationships to recognize one from ten-miles away. Despite this being no different, he didn't move. He hated himself a little more for that.

"You're not sorry," he said bleakly.

"I wanted to see what would happen," said Hannibal, a touch of something akin to almost guilt in his voice. "I wanted to see if you were right, when you threatened me. 'You're so sly, but so am I.' Now that I know, I won't be repeating it. I promise."

"You promise," Will scoffed.

"I keep my promises, Will."

"Tell that to Molly."

"Would you like me to? I certainly will, if you'd like," Hannibal offered, and god dammit if he didn't sound utterly sincere.

"Don't," Will warned, and he tensed. "Don't you…just leave her alone, Hannibal. Leave her the fuck alone."

"Does she know of us, now?" Hannibal wondered out loud. Another pass of gentle fingertips along his spine, pausing at the small of his back. "As you lay at her hospital bed, did she see your eyes and know?"

"Yes."

"She'd have seen your eyes enough while you were together that she'd note the difference immediately," Hannibal murmured. "Did she forgive you, like you said she would?"

"…Yes." It stung worst of all, her grace. She held him much like Hannibal did, the two of them pressed chest to side in the hospital bed as she tried to soothe his fears away, whispering what they'd do once he came back to her. Her voice lulled him to something not-quite sleep, but far more rest than he'd gotten in a long time.

"A sweet woman."

He slid his hands up to Will's face, and he passed fingertips along his jaw, tilting his head so that he could better look into his eyes, two faux-blues that burned and needed more eyedrops put into them. His thumbs brushed against his cheekbones, and the expression in his gaze was enough to make Will's knees weak, make his heart burst at the sight. He hated this. He fucking hated this.

“Your suffering is as beautiful as St. Sebastian, but I’m sure even God felt pain at seeing him clubbed to death.” His thumb slid along Will’s bottom lip, gentle. A harsh contrast to the way Will had last left him, teeth against skin, thumb pressed to his lip like he could bruise it. Will shuddered at the touch.

“I hate you,” he promised, and Hannibal dipped his head down, a hair’s-breadth away.

“I know,” he replied, and he pressed his lips to Will’s.

Hands gripped the front of Hannibal’s jumpsuit, and he pressed himself against the bars, a hiss of breath escaping him at the touch. It was hot; it was cold. It was wanting; it was giving. His mouth was soft against Will’s, searching, seeking. He’d once thought that at the inevitable rush of emotions between them, their first kiss would have been angry, biting and forceful –perhaps his supposition had been the beginning of the end, since he’d subconsciously resigned himself to an inevitable kiss.

It was so much more wonderful than that. Somehow, that made it utterly worse.

It was as much giving as taking, as kind as it was cruel in its attentions. Hannibal held so still against him, letting his twisting, grasping grip tighten against his chest as he exhaled shakily. He tilted his head for a better angle, moving his mouth against Will’s with a need dancing the line of genuine desire, something more than their eyes and the chemicals inside. Fingers tangled into his hair, and when Will sighed, soft and pleased, it seemed to unravel Hannibal as much as it did Will.

Hannibal broke the kiss long enough to kiss the tip of his nose, the top of his head. They were the touch of a lover, not a hunger. He pressed forehead to forehead and held him close, heartbeat staccato against Will’s ribs, and he wondered dazedly how long it’d been since Hannibal had been been touched like that. Orderlies, policemen, FBI agents; Hannibal’s need came from years of starved skin, of the burning realization he’d die completely alone. Will didn’t like seeing that aspect of him. He resented it.

“I’m going to go,” Will said quietly. He didn’t move.

“You have a killer to catch; of course you are.”

“Are you going to send him more ways to hurt me, Hannibal?” A short breath caught. Fingers tightened in Will’s hair.

“…No. What happens between you and Francis Dolarhyde is completely between you and Francis Dolarhyde.”

Will believed him. He couldn’t say in that moment if he was the one being tricked, or if he was the one tricking, but he drew away from him all the same, grim. Maybe if Molly could have seen him like that, wanting, yearning, she wouldn’t have forgiven him so easily. His jaw clenched, unclenched, and he looked down rather than stare into two hauntingly beautiful, mismatched eyes. He was the one tricking, but he was sure he was being tricked, too.

He had to be, right?

“Don’t stay away from me, Dr. Graham,” Hannibal said, and for the love of god he sounded genuinely concerned. “At the very least, for yourself.”

“Threatening me?”

“I’m unaccustomed to being concerned for another individual like this,” Hannibal informed him. “I felt you at the very edge, prepared to do something no one can take back after acting on. Your final moment, taking intrinsic responsibility for your own life by punishing me in a way that I couldn’t return the favor for. Fear is a new sensation for me, but I felt it through you. I felt it for you.”

“I’d kill myself if it meant that you hurt,” Will murmured.

“Yes, I know.” A soft lull, a whisper around them that urged Will to draw close again. He didn’t. “Having seen your dreams, having felt how you relished in your own pain at our distance, taking it upon yourself like a mantel, I believe you.”

“You were jealous that even with this…between us, I still would go back to Molly and leave you behind.”

“Jealousy is an ugly thing. I was merely concerned you’d harm yourself for the sake of it harming me; self-harm is a serious condition that should be handled delicately.”

“Delicately,” Will spit out. “That was delicate to you? That was fucking delicate?”

“It got your attention so that we could speak.” A soft, quiet sigh. “I wasn’t sure I could convince someone to get a letter out to you after the last incident. You wield masochism like it is your bedmate, but I grew weary of knowing that you were hurting. I can endure pain as well as you, but the knowledge of your agony is more than I can bear, helpless as this cell makes me to ease it.”

Hannibal reached out, and he took Will’s hand, cradling it like it was fragile. Will didn’t move closer, but he didn’t pull away; he instead stared as Hannibal traced his life line, then his heart line. Deliberately, he dipped his head and pressed a kiss to his open palm.

“Even as you hate me, you understand why I did it,” Hannibal mused. “I don’t think it’s the soulmate connection that gives you such understanding, though. In your vastly mirrored mind, you were me, and you feared losing something that gave you a connection past these hideously tacky stone walls.”

“You’d hate to lose your new toy,” Will said snidely. He ignored the way his heart pounded.

“I abhor that you to hurt yourself in the hopes that it hurt me worse.” He pressed another kiss to his palm, slid his thumb across it like he could ingrain its actions deeper into his skin. “Go and catch your killer now, dear Will. Don’t mis-imagine me while you do.”

Will left, although once he was in the safety of the rental car, he pressed his palm to his mouth to inhale the feeling of his lips.

He hated himself for that, too.

-

Matthew Brown was held at the Baltimore Police Department, and they let Will in to see him after a quick run-down with Chief Norton. He'd heard much about what'd happened, and the pitying glance did nothing to foster good will. Will endured it, though. He had to play nice to see Matthew. He had to play nice to understand.

They sat in one of the interrogation rooms, and when Will looked up from hands he'd concentrated on keeping clasped and amiable in appearance, he was surprised to see mismatched eyes rather than two solid green ones:

One eye green, the other seafoam blue.

"…Who'd you connect to, Matthew?" Will couldn't help but ask. He almost blurted it, what with the way it fell from his lips. Startled. Confused.

"Is that a question?" One of Matthew's hands twitched, although handcuffed to the table he couldn't do much. "Don't recognize your own eyes, Dr. Graham?"

No. Not anymore, at least; not after he'd lost them to someone else.

"When did that happen?" he asked, jaw working furiously. Surprise made him twitchy.

"Three years ago." A pause. "Three and a half," he corrected.

"Impossible," Will snapped, and Matthew laughed a little, lightly tapping fingers on the table.

"They made me take the contacts out," he explained. "…They didn't make you take out yours, though. I guess that's because they don't know, yet."

"How do you know about that," he hissed, and he grabbed Matthew by the wrist, slamming it down flat to the table. There was a pause, from one ragged breath to the next, where he realized just what he'd done, assaulting someone, using force. Matthew didn't seem to mind it, though. He tilted his head eerily, much like Lecter's, and a playful smile flickered about his mouth. His hand didn't move beneath Will's. It lay splayed out on the table, giving in the wake of Will's anger.

"I met your gaze once, three and a half years ago when you visited with Dr. Bloom in order to see if any released patients from the institution exhibited signs pertaining to your Minnesota Shrike in their old files. You were quite articulate, explaining his mannerisms, his thoughts. You dropped your papers, and when you bent down to get them, I helped. I was somewhat a fan of you, you see. We met eyes, brief, something that I'm sure you hadn't even realized, feverish as you were at the time."

“A fan,” Will repeated flatly.

“You saw things no one else saw. You were the psychiatrist that could walk into a room, glance about at the small things and reveal the inner workings of a genius’ art.” Matthew boasted. He spoke like he was personally proud of the accomplishment, like he’d done it himself. “I thought, what if he saw someone like me?”

“I didn’t.”

“After shift, I took a nap,” he continued, ignoring Will’s jab. “When I woke up, one of my eyes was yours.” Matthew Brown’s voice was soft, a lull to it from practice of trying to maintain a guise. Will’s eyes narrowed on him, even as he released his hand. “Of course, when you didn’t come back to the institute in a rage, and when I certainly didn’t feel a connection from you, I realized it was only a half-connection. One side of a soulmate.”

“You didn’t say anything,” Will managed. His throat was dry, and he reached up to rub his face, his mind refusing to connect, refusing to see the things in front of him as real. That wasn’t his eye.

That wasn’t his eye.

“Why would I make a complete ass of myself by saying anything?” His head tilted the other way, and he sighed quietly. “I did what you did. And I know what you did; I’ve stared at my eyes long enough to memorize the color, and those aren’t your eyes, Dr. Graham.”

“Aren’t they?”

“You’re hiding a maroon one.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Will challenged.

“We saw his eyes, and I realized he’d gotten what I couldn’t. I thought to be jealous, maybe…angry. I saw your contacts, and I really thought about hurting him. I couldn’t, though.” Matthew looked to his hands, twisted them awkwardly in order to stare down at them. “I thought about what would have happened if you’d just *looked* at me, Dr. Graham, really fucking saw me. But you didn’t, you saw him, and if I’d hurt him, you’d hurt.”

“It wouldn’t hurt you to hurt me, though,” Will said quietly.

“It would hurt you to hurt Molly,” Matthew replied, and his pitch lowered. “Just because you don’t feel it physically the way you would a soulmate doesn’t mean you don’t hurt when someone you care about hurts. I couldn’t bring myself to hurt you like that, and I’d never felt that kind of consideration towards a person before. I thought, seeing him is enough. Seeing him happy and content is enough.”

It sounded too much like Hannibal, him saying that. It sounded kind, the idea of someone being afraid for him being in pain, considering how he’d feel to hurt. It was as infuriating as it was beautiful, as hideous as it was touching.

“It wasn’t, though,” Will said coldly. “You set me up.”

“He said it’d be a painless way to kill Molly,” he said heavily. He looked up at him, nodding at Will’s stricken expression. “Yeah, I lied when I said I didn’t know Molly. You were going to stay with her, even when you had someone right in front of you that knew you the way I wished to know you. I spoke with him after you did, questioned him. When he realized I had a half-connection, he asked why I’d be so interested in helping him.”

“Asking myself the same thing,” said Will angrily. He moved his hands below the table, the urge to lunge across the table fast rising. He regretted letting Jack and Chilton keep him from punching him.

“You know you see those hawks on power lines, Dr. Graham?” Matthew glanced up at the ceiling, pensive. “And they’re secluded, regal. Then they get mobbed by a bunch of little birds and they fly off, run off by the numbers. Lecter and I, we’re the hawks. You’re a hawk. The only weakness hawks have is that they’re solitary, alone. I thought to help him out, since you were wasting your time trying to love a finch when you could have a hawk instead.”

“If you were really my soulmate, you’d know how much that would hurt me to hurt her,” he seethed. His voice shook, and he lowered it.

“Can you honestly tell me you can go back to someone like her when you have someone like Lecter?” Matthew asked. The bastard had the gall to laugh. His handcuffs shifted, and he tapped fingers along the table top. “Someone that knows you, *sees* you the way he does? The way that I wish you’d see *me*?”

I’m trying to, Will thought, a tremor working its way down his spine. *I’m trying to go back to Molly.*

“Dr. Gideon informed me that you belonged there with the rest of them,” Will said lightly, forcing his voice to remain level, calm. “Chief Norton informed me that he’d allow me to make that sort of estimation in front of a judge.”

“…What do you mean?” Matthew asked warily.

“You connected to me because your darkness found something within mine that appealed to you, didn’t it?” At Matthew’s slow, uncertain nod, he grinned –more of a grimace, somehow more satisfying at the way it made his gaze narrow. “I’ll give you a firsthand glance at just what you thought you’d connected to, Matthew. You fucked with my life out of selfish desire, now you get to reap what you sow. You’ll get to see me often, like you wanted.”

“What are you going to do, Dr. Graham?”

There it was, the nervousness. Like an adder, poised to strike, Will dove for that uncertainty, that hesitance. “I’ll have you sent to the BSHCI; a psychotic break at a half-connection never filled, at your desires that ultimately made you try and aid in the murder of an innocent woman.”

"I'll tell Chilton you have a connection to Lecter," Matthew threatened. His gaze darted, his bottom lip curling into his mouth as he wet it. Will tilted his head, mirroring him, honing in on the fear he could smell, sharp with sweat and disgust.

"…That'd *hurt* me, Matthew," Will whispered to him. "And now that I'm more invested in my soulmate than ever before, do you really want to hurt me?"

He stood up, and Matthew tracked his movements, his hands jerking back against the handcuffs. It was satisfying, seeing him internally warring, struggling with a love he'd hidden for years before it burst from him in the ugliest way imaginable. Finding pleasure in the panic lurking in his eyes made Will hate himself a little bit.

Doing bad things to bad people makes me feel good, he thought, walking out of the room.

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In front of the judge a week later, he attested to the traits of known psychotic breaks that occurred at the hands of half-connections in soulmates. Credentials were laid out, summaries cross-referenced, and the judge agreed that Matthew Brown should be moved to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, for aid in therapy under the close supervision of Dr. Chilton. It was the humane, fair was to handle that form of trauma, the feeling of not quite having the connection that so many soulmates enjoyed. Once Will saw the mismatched eyes of the judge, he knew it'd be an easy ruling.

Matthew Brown said nothing as this was happening to him. When asked his stance on whether he had an opinion on jail or the institution being better, he shrugged, a slight twitch of the shoulder. It was decided, then. As he was led away, his mismatched eyes sought Will out at the doorway, and he nodded once. Will struggled to swallow, shifted in his chair, and nodded back. Sweet retribution, but it didn't feel so sweet going down. It felt more like taking a pill dry, the bitter coating on the outside dragging down the throat until it hit the stomach hard.

Love broke people, Will thought dazedly on the courtroom steps. He watched them load Matthew Brown into the transport that would take him to the BSHCI, contact-covered eyes staring at the back of the vehicle. Love made people do things that were self-deprecating, asinine, foolish. Love made him break his back, spewing apologies to Molly. Love made Matthew Brown hide himself away until he could see Will again, unspeaking in his affections, a shuttered wall that Will couldn't see until it was too late.

I thought, what if he saw someone like me?

He had his revenge, though –was it revenge? Something much like it. He bought a smoothie at a small food truck, sat on a bench and stared out at the hustle and bustle of the people rushing around him, hectic in their schedules and their lives. More eyes were mismatched than not, and he turned the cold cup around in his hands as he studied them, wondering what it'd be like to be *like* them.

No matter how Will tried to twist it, much like he twisted the cup around, he couldn't claim that his actions were anything more than petty revenge.

Hannibal would have been proud.

He was distracted by a phone call, although it was only the last few tones of it that really broke through the haze of his mind. He kept going back to that moment when he'd grabbed Matthew's wrist, when Matthew had allowed him that burst of anger. When he'd lunged across the table at the BSHCI, would he have let Will strike him? Strangle him? All in the name of some misguided love bought at the cost of one odd-colored eye?

"Hello?" he asked, gripping the smoothie cup tight in one hand.

"People at the office are beginning to wonder if you're dead," Dr. Avery said by way of greeting. "What with the news."

"The news lies, mostly," he replied.

"That, and what happened at the house with Molly."

"Molly's okay," he reassured her.

"That's good to hear. I'd ask for an address to send a gift basket, but I don't want to compromise anything." A short laugh, and Will allowed the joke, his smile directed at the smoothie. Now that he had it, he wanted to throw it away.

"If you send it to me, I'll get it to her."

"Oh no, I'm not falling for that. You'll eat it."

"If you're foolish enough to send a food basket, you can't blame me for eating anything out of it before sending her the rejects."

"And now I'm remembering every single work party and why I never got a chance to eat the Little Smokies at the buffet table," she said with a laugh. An awkward pause as she debated her next words. "How are you feeling?" she finally asked.

"A poor attempt, doctor," he rebuked lightly. "At the very least, you could try a Rorschach test?"

"If I could send one over the phone, I would." Another lull as she gathered her thoughts, and Will gathered his guilt from the puddle of condensation that'd collected on his hand from the cup. He regretted a lot of things, mostly wasting money on the smoothie. "What happened to the cop? With everything that's happened, I can't help but worry if my advice led to this."

Will barked out a sharp laugh. Her advice. Like it was her fault that he'd tried playing games with a very dangerous man. Like it was her fault he'd tried to lie to Lecter, and Lecter responded by burning his safe places down around him. No, if there was one thing that Will

Graham was wonderful at, it was hoisting all of the blame onto himself rather than anyone else. She may have given him advice, but he's the one that doused the house in kerosene.

Dolarhyde had, too. They both burned their houses down.

"He's doing his best," he finally said. She was patient, much like he was. His answers came slow, and she was willing to wait.

"Are you helping him?"

"Honestly, I don't know if I'm doing more help than harm," he confessed. "I'm trying, though. He's trying. I'm trying to figure out what he wants in the end."

"After this, are you considering pulling him?" A pause. "Tell me you're not blaming *him* for what's happened."

"No, no, this is completely my fault," Will assured her. "You may have suggested using him as a proxy, but the man in maximum probably saw me as the puppeteer. Who was he going to blame when he didn't get what he wanted? The soulmate, the police, or the soulmate psychiatrist?"

"Certainly the soulmate psychiatrist," Avery said.

"I don't think I can pull him, though," Will continued. "He's…seeing the things that connected him to his soulmate. He's seeing just what they have in common that made this happen."

"Is he reconciling it well?"

"To an extent. I think he views it as…having these traits make him grotesque but useful. He wants to help people, he wants to do well, but to do that he feels that he has to make certain decisions that are less than savory. He…feels that pull to his soulmate like nothing before."

"The road to a victory isn't always paved in gold," she said, then stopped and laughed at herself, a snorting sound that was as endearing as it was loud. "Sorry, that was…that was just corny."

"It was," Will agreed.

"I think you'd have a lot in common with him, if you didn't mind opening up. Some of your methods in therapy are a little unorthodox, but it does the job nicely. Sometimes better than textbook, I'd say."

"It was only unorthodox to you because you thought not having a soulmate means I'm unqualified to explain-"

"Yes, yes, I'm not ashamed to admit that you were right," she said irritably. "You are more than qualified to explain the ramifications of soulmate infidelity in regards to half-connections versus whole connections, which is what I said later, if you recall. I can swallow

my pride, which is more than I can say about you getting puffed up with it when I admitted that I was wrong."

Will swallowed a smile. "How did you know to call me, Dr. Avery?"

"We've worked together for a few years now, Graham. Long enough that when I saw the news and heard about Molly, my first thought was 'how is that poor soulmate doing', and then, 'I bet Graham is just hating himself after all of this.'"

"Molly isn't my soulmate," he said quietly.

"No, but I've seen the way you look at her, and sometimes it's like she's the buoy that's keeping your head above water at sea. She's not a soulmate, but she's a lifeline."

Molly was a lifeline. Will's head felt like it was underwater. He wondered bleakly that if he went to see Hannibal again, if he could smooth the tides around him like he had before, each pass of his bloodied hands making Will feel a lot less like he was drowning and more like he could finally breathe.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for all of your feedback! Someone offered to do fanart for this and I'm like...whaaat? People just...do that?? Because you like the writing so much???

It's surreal in the best of ways tbh, you guys just blow me away with how amazing you are.

Amongst packing for a move, trying to transfer jobs due to said move, and trying to fix a truck that decided to break down again, I present to you their first kiss. I hope you enjoyed :)

Two Rogue Cloud Blues

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 10:

To Catch a Madman: It Takes a Madman?

Two murders, both horrendous in their method and brutality, have swept across the nation in a state of panic. We remember Michael Frost, who targeted his victims and strung them up like icicle lights towards the anniversary of his soulmate's demise, and we certainly remember Charles Ganse, whose obsession with soulmates caused him to kidnap couples in order to collect their mismatched eyes. There are none so deadly as the Red Dragon, though, who has finally stepped out of the darkness in order to drag Dr. Will Graham to the light.

We last remember Dr. Will Graham as a consultant to the FBI who aided in psychological profiles of killers. After his admittance to a psyche ward following his killing of Garrett Jacob Hobbs –you will remember him better as the Minnesota Shrike –we believed his career in profiling criminals was at an end. It seems, with the death of two and more to come, that he has been brought out of retirement in order to help the FBI one more time.

I found him outside of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, after a meeting he'd held with Baltimore's own resident cannibal, Hannibal Lecter. He was neither calm nor collected, and I was once again reminded of how he'd been just a few years before, a consultant for the FBI, but certainly no agent. The screening process alone is arduous to be an agent, and it is quick to find any forms of mental instability.

Is the FBI so desperate that they not only turned to Dr. Graham, but to Hannibal the Cannibal, too? Are they at such a loss that in order to catch this madman, they employ not one, but two? These are desperate times for America, and we can only witness with trepidation the bumbling ways that the Federal Bureau of Investigation is trying to keep us safe. To be sure, the Red Dragon is watching, and he's as amused as we are terrified.

"Will," Jack cautioned.

"I'm fine," Will said pleasantly. The coffee sloshing over the rim of his cup said otherwise, but Jack wasn't going to point that out. His hands shook, and he stared out of the window, elbow digging into the newspaper with a vengeance. He imagined it to be Freddie Lounds' face.

"It could have been worse."

"She talked about my-"

"I know what she talked about," Jack cut in smoothly. "Forget about her. She doesn't matter; I do. I say it's not relevant."

“She’s right, though. You’re desperate, and we haven’t got much.”

“We know who it is, we know his motivations, we know what he’s capable of, and we know that at some point, he’s going to try for Lecter. That’s far more than we had a month ago.”

“How’s he *choosing* them, Jack.” Will destroyed a buttered roll beneath anxious fingers. “That’s how you find him, now that he’s shadow suspended in dust. You got his wife safe, you got his face, and you’ve got an art gallery that wants his head for eating prized art, but you don’t know how he’s *choosing* who to kill, so you don’t know where to find him.”

“Do you have an idea?” Jack asked.

Will finished his coffee and set the cup down a little too hard; it rattled in the saucer and drew the ire of the waitress walking by. An hour of sitting, and they’d ordered coffee, biscuits and gravy without the gravy, and a roll. Her worst nightmare realized.

“I think I’d be good bait,” he said. He stared out of the window, watching a colorful argument wedged between two cars. They were soulmates, their faces close enough to kiss, their fists close enough to hurt. He thought about Hannibal stroking his back to ease the knots out of it, and he shuddered.

“Molly wouldn’t forgive me if I used you as bait,” Jack said, but he didn’t sound opposed in the least. A thread of intrigue filtered in his voice.

“She already hates you,” Will said cheerfully. “She asked if the safe house would have any Crawfords in it, and when I said no she was grateful I took that into consideration.”

Silence. Jack was many things, but the years taught Will that he wasn’t kind. He’d done his fair share of putting Will in the sort of mental places that Alana ground her teeth at night over, and he did so with conscious precision and no guilt. If it meant they caught a killer, what did he care what happened to Will? Will was just one, and the body count of a serial killer was far too many to risk.

“I’ll see what can be done,” Jack said slowly.

Will left him in the shitty diner with Lounds’ article, a disintegrated roll, and the responsibility of the tip to the murderous, matching-eyed waitress.

-

Chilton intercepted him on his way to Lecter, and for that he was annoyed. He seemed to radiate something, though, something that gave Will enough pause to be uncertain, on edge. He followed him to his office and sat down, legs spread and hands resting on his thighs. He gnawed on his bottom lip.

“You know, Dr. Graham, I have to say that I’m an absolute horror at keeping secrets,” Chilton began, and Will bit down on his lip a little harder to keep something snarky at bay.

“I’ve been rather good about this one, but recent events have led me to believe that I would be doing you a disservice to keep quiet any longer.”

“What,” Will prompted flatly.

Chilton turned his computer monitor around so that Will could see it; a series of videos were shown, from isolation rooms to hallways to Abel Gideon’s room. Will studied them dispassionately, although his heart stumbled a little. He didn’t like where this was going.

“Now, according to the law, I can only keep video of hallways, access points, and rooms where the patient is a danger to themselves and must be monitored. Unfortunately, no matter how hard I wheedled, Lecter’s room was none of those things.”

“Alright.”

“Then your clever little stint with the partitions put you at an advantage, allowing a wall of privacy.”

Will said nothing to that, since such a clever little stint had been his goal in its entirety.

“What I do have, though, is audio.” Chilton’s brown eyes flickered in triumph, noting the tensing of Will’s shoulders. He couldn’t help it, an involuntary action.

“That’s not legal, either,” Will managed. His fingers curled to fists on his lap.

“We have arguably one of the smartest serial killers within these walls, Dr. Graham, and I wasn’t going to leave his actions here to chance,” Chilton retorted. “He wasn’t forthcoming in conversations-”

“So you bugged his room to hear just what he said when you weren’t around,” Will snapped. His leg jiggled slightly as he bounced its weight on the ball of his foot.

“There was nothing of true note until you came along, in reality,” Chilton said, unheeding of Will’s discomfort. “You walked through those doors, though, Dr. Graham, and something changed fundamentally.”

He clicked a button on the screen, and a crackly, soft but clear voice came through.

“What the fuck did you do to me?”

“I don’t understand; of what am I being accused?”

“Stop,” Will prompted. Chilton didn’t stop, merely fast-forwarded. Will despised hearing just how panicked and terrified he sounded.

“If I kiss you now, will you ask me for more?”

“Run along now, Dr. Graham, before I make you stay.”

“Stop,” Will said again, harsher. That time, Chilton did. He clasped his hands on his desk, pleased to see Will’s undivided attention.

“One-sided connection indeed, Dr. Graham,” he said triumphantly. “At first, I was happy to let this continue, learn as I needed on a psychological level as well as a soulmate level. Your horror in of itself was enough to satisfy me. After your last meeting with him, though, Barney informed me that through the cracks in the partition, it wasn’t a mere conversation you were having with him. The silence on the audio was enough to convince me.”

“It’s not illegal to have a soulmate,” Will said, but it sounded tinny, even to him. The back of his neck prickled, uncomfortable, and he was aware that about four hundred and fifty seven yards away, Hannibal knew something was amiss.

“Not in the least, but I do have to protect you from yourself.” Chilton smiled, and it didn’t reach his eyes. “I said he gets into your head, Dr. Graham, and I was correct.”

Hannibal got into his head. Matthew Brown took one eye, Hannibal took another. Will thought of his dreams where he removed his eyes, fingers blood-stained and lips trembling as he tried to put himself back together. Whenever Hannibal tried to do it for him, he cringed away from it. He was in his head, he was in his eyes, he was in his *fucking* dreams.

“What are you going to do, then?” Will asked, and this time his tone was far better controlled. Darker. Harsher. “He has pertinent information regarding the serial killer that the FBI is currently hunting for, and pulling me from interviewing him would be seen as an obstruction of justice. He won’t speak to anyone else but me on the matter –let alone you, who had to bug his room in order to glean any words from him in their entirety.”

It wasn’t quite smart to goad the one holding the key to his soulmate, but Will didn’t back down, his eyes flicking up to Chilton’s chin, then his two brown eyes that darkened at the challenge. Will wasn’t afraid of becoming a soulmate to Chilton. Chilton would die alone because no one in the world would chemically bond to him. The thought made Will smile, a savage twist at the edges.

“I have no designs on making this public, since his stacks of lonely hearts letters would only grow at the thought that he would potentially connect to any of them, too. He sometimes makes me feel more like a secretary rather than an administrator.” At that, Chilton sniffed. “At the same time, Dr. Graham, we must look out for one another, mustn’t we? Psychiatrists and all.”

“Psychiatrists and all,” Will echoed.

“I want you to keep him talking. I want you to get him to talk about himself. As fascinated as I am with the way he’s delved into you, he’s the one I’m attempting to write a book on. If I tried to write a book about you, I think Dr. Bloom would fly down here in a rage with Verger lawyers at her back.”

“I’m under no legal obligation to do that,” Will said. “In fact, I can think of several laws put in place for the sole purpose of protecting soulmates against that.”

“Oh, come now, Dr. Graham; you know that the connection between the two of you isn’t something you *want*.” Chilton propped his chin up and considered Will, fingers curling like hooks over his cheek. “I could all but feel your repulsion radiating from you every time you walked through my doors. We can help one another.”

“I’m not going to let you use me.”

“If you’re not inclined to help, I’m not entirely inclined to keep your secrets.”

There it was. The blackmail on the table. Will bit down on the fat of his cheek, hard. He could just imagine the fury on Jack’s face, the horror and indignation at his secrecy and his mental state. Maybe if he’d come clean sooner, they’d have simply removed him from the case, but this far into everything, it’d be seen as something worse. Jack would take it just about as personally as anyone was capable of –an attack of the worst kind, seeing as how the only person in the world Will seemed capable of connecting to was a cannibalistic serial killer.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Will said at last. He gritted his teeth. “Last time I tried to play him, though, I’ll remind you that my girlfriend was almost murdered.”

“I have every faith in you,” Chilton said, pleased.

He was given his partitions, whatever that meant. Will rocked from his heels to his toes, then back again as they were set up. Beside him, Abel leaned against the bars.

“I saw what you did,” he said conversationally.

“Did you, Dr. Gideon?”

“You got Matthew Brown sentenced here rather than prison. A smart move on your part, Dr. Graham. Now that his contacts are out, he’s just one of us in the end.”

So am I, Will thought savagely.

“I thought it was best, given his half-connection. The psychotic break alone wasn’t something they’d help him with in a prison.”

“That, and his half-connection to you is all the orderlies can talk about,” Gideon said gleefully. “Dr. Graham, so entrenched in soulmates that people are connecting to him left and right. First Matthew, then Hannibal Lecter. Just what would it take for you to connect back, I wonder?”

The knowing look on his face told Will that the question was rhetorical. He knew everything.

“…You tried to warn me,” he said at last, taking a step closer to the bars.

Gideon tilted his head, regarded Will with a small, twitching smile. He looked around, like he was searching for someone else that may have been listening in, then shrugged innocently, leaning into the corner between the bars and the wall.

“I may have been inclined,” he said slyly.

Will stared at him, the faint stubble, the face soft rather than angled like Lecter’s. He didn’t work out with a ferocity that Will felt Hannibal did, muscles aching in the aftermath. He was content with his bed and what little he was allowed inside of the cell. He had nothing better to do, Will supposed, than to try and stir the shit, rile him up.

And yet…

“Thank you, Dr. Gideon,” he said at last, sincere. “For trying.”

“As I said, I do like it when people are polite. No reason or motive in the world other than the fact that you choose to be kind when you could be cruel. Enough people are cruel when they could be kind, I think.”

Will nodded, rubbed his mouth to wipe away the small smile that threatened. He wondered what Abel Gideon would think if he knew that Will had intentionally found a way to lock Matthew Brown back into the BSHCI. He’d been cruel when he could have been kind. Maybe though, maybe Abel Gideon of all people would see he’d only done it because people had a habit of just not leaving him the hell alone, like Alana and Will both wanted so damn much.

“Prepare yourself, though, Dr. Graham,” Abel said when Will didn’t speak. “You’re not going to like what you see just on the other side of that partition. Not. One. Bit.”

“…Thank you for the warning,” he said, and at a nod from Barney at the partition, he turned and walked around it, leaving Abel in his corner, smirking with his secrets.

Abel was right. He didn’t like it. Not. One. Bit.

He pushed down against the concrete, and it pushed back. There had been a time, when he was younger and far less in control of himself –he steadfastly ignored the fact that he still didn’t really feel in control of himself –when he’d dig his fingernails so hard into his palms that he’d break skin. It was that or shout, fists hitting dry wall as he tried to get the demons out from under his skin. There was a myriad of ways to try and control the sudden rush of fury, and he was sometimes an avid fan of counting backwards from ten, then twenty, then fifty. He did that now, staring. Hannibal studied his body language, gaze narrowed and curious.

“They took your things,” Will said after the silence felt too heavy.

“A punishment for ultimately leading you into a wild goose chase, obstructing justice, and endangering lives, or so I’m told,” Hannibal replied amiably. If he was troubled, he gave no indication. Will was absolutely troubled, though. The drawings on the wall were gone, as well as the books, newspapers, and table. Even the chair, bolted as it had been, had been taken away, holes in the ground where it’d been screwed into the floor. The pens, letters, and magazines were also missing, and it, for the first time, seemed like an honest, true cell.

Apart from the initial shock, there was a dark part of Will that delighted in Hannibal having to live among the muck and the mire like the rest of the murderers and killers had to. What other serial killer could boast an extensive library and constant correspondence with psychiatrists and grad students? There was something righteously glorious about three grey, hideous cement walls.

No, the only thing that truly bothered Will was the glass wall that separated them from floor to ceiling, nothing but holes along the top of the glass allowing air to circulate and speech to be heard. It looked to be a foot thick, a dense and formidable material. How Chilton had gotten it up in a day, Will wasn't quite sure –it was likely he'd had it at the ready when he was done eavesdropping on Will and Hannibal. The invasion of his privacy, of his weaknesses exposed in such a blasé manner –

-It made him think an awful lot about how doing bad things to bad people felt really, really good.

"I'd ask how you're feeling, but it's an extreme enough emotion that I don't have to ask. It's radiating in my pulse," Hannibal said.

"Dr. Chilton is listening."

"Yes, I imagine he is," he agreed. "When you leave, he will likely filter in an evangelical broadcast to make me reflect on the things I've done. That, coupled with the glass divider; he does enjoy his petty torments."

"That invasive, fucking-" He cut himself off. Chilton was listening.

His head cocked to the side, curious. "Did you suppose I'd be granted privacy?"

"I supposed *I'd* be granted privacy," Will said. He thought about sitting down, but he tossed the idea. His blood curdled, livid.

"It made me curious about what you'd do next. Is this the end for us?"

Will shook his head, and he walked to the barrier, the tips of his shoes brushing against the wall. In the reflection of the glass, he saw both himself and Hannibal, and he wondered dazedly if that's what it was to be soulmates –to see so much of yourself in someone else that you bled together. He swallowed with difficulty; he didn't want to bleed out, to become a distorted part of himself. His madness was like an oil spill, and he desperately wanted to contain it.

"Ah, I see; you take no issue in avoiding being so close to me as long as it is by your choice, but now that the choice was taken away, you're upset."

"Is this funny to you?" Will asked.

"Yes," Hannibal said, shaking his head no. Will tasted the thinly veiled fury that licked along his bones, and he wasn't sure anymore if it was his or of it was Lecter's. It was possessive. Dark. "What are you going to do now, dear Will? I'm curious."

“I don’t know,” Will said. A lie, and Hannibal felt it as much as he saw it in the dark look beyond the plastic lenses Will wore to hide just what he was. A moment, charged with something smacking of sin, flickered between them. Hannibal licked his lips. They didn’t need words, and Will wasn’t sure how he felt about that.

Will lifted his hand up, and he placed his palm to the glass, pressed his fingertips deep like he could break the barrier by will alone. He stared into Hannibal’s mismatched eyes, Hannibal stared back, and after a second that tasted like a thousand heartbeats, Hannibal lifted his palm and pressed back.

I’ll play your game, Hannibal mouthed to him. *Since you were so obliging to play mine.*

Will nodded, and he walked away, leaving Hannibal with his palm print and the sense of something on the horizon. His bones hummed, small sparks of electricity on his tongue.

-

Jack Crawford was about as well-versed in the art of swearing as any other person. As he raged and paced in the confines of Will’s hotel room, he used every word under the sun that he could grasp onto in such a moment as that, palms hot and eyes blindingly furious. Will watched from the safety of the chair he sometimes slept in, a whiskey sour in hand, chewed-up straw dangling from his mouth. His eyes did not itch, nor did they convey a lie bought at the convenient price of $24.99.

“And of all of the fucking, god damned, piece of shit –over a month, Will? A fucking *month*?” A deep inhalation. “More than a month, quite a few *fucking months*?”

“Hannibal god-damned Lecter?” Will mouthed along with him, swirling his drink.

“When I said –and I know I fucking said it –when I fucking said to come to me if you felt you were in too deep, did it occur to you that that was too deep?”

A rhetorical question. Will made the mistake of not-quite catching that the first time, and he’d been verbally steamrolled. Hence the drink.

Well over an hour took Jack to stopping mid-step and staring at the wall like it had the answers. The fight hadn’t left him, but the ability to convey even his basest of emotions had. Like a balloon pricked with a fine-tipped needle, the air had to ease out of him sooner or later. Three drinks later, in Will’s case.

“It’s not ideal for me, either, Jack,” Will said, turning the straw over and over in his hands. “It’s not been a vacation.”

“You lied to me,” Jack managed, still staring at the wall.

“I told you I didn’t want to do this, and you made me do this. I walked in there, and I got fucked over more than you did, I think.”

“Oh, you think?” Jack rounded on him, but seeing the empty glass in his hand seemed to shock some of the anger out of him –he balked at the image of a too calm Dr. Graham.

“I’m thinking, ‘I’ve got a serial killer in my head, and I’ve got one at my back, scratching at it.’”

“This has compromised this entire investigation,” Jack groused.

“It hasn’t. I haven’t broken any laws, and Lecter’s already imprisoned for murdering people, so his obstruction of justice isn’t really going to bother him too much,” Will pointed out. “Besides, it gives you what you want, doesn’t it? I’ve got a real bad feeling that I should linger right around this area, and you need me to help you catch your Red Dragon, right around this area.”

“Oh, no, the fuck you are,” Jack snarled. “You’re on a plane to Molly –Christ’s sake, Will, does Molly know?”

“Molly knows,” said Will amiably.

“How’s she feel about that?”

“I’m thinking, ‘I warned you this would change me, Molly. You won’t know me the same.’ And she said, ‘I’ll get to know you all over again.’”

“You’re off this case, and I-”

“The fuck I am, Jack,” Will said, and Jack stopped at the sound of the glass falling out of Will’s hand, hitting the floor with an anticlimactic thud and rolling on its side. Will thought about leaving it, but he ultimately sighed, bent down and retrieved it, straw dangling from his lips. He thought about Molly and cringed.

“I didn’t hear that,” Jack warned him.

“You did,” Will retorted. “Molly almost died because of Red Dragon, and you dragged me out of a pretty god damn good life to come find him for you. I’ve got a maroon eye that belongs to a serial killer behind a glass wall, and I’ve got a pretty good idea to suss out your killer that you wanted so badly you wrecked my life to get him.”

There were many things that Jack Crawford was, but kind was not one of them. Will felt his eyes, weighing and assessing, and he knew without having to know that he’d piqued his interest –enough to at least hear him out. In the end, no matter what he felt for Will, mercy wasn’t one of those things. He’d sacrifice Will for anything, and Will was counting on that.

“What’s the idea?”

“He loves reading about Lecter, doesn’t he? And now I’ve interested him.” Will shifted in his chair, getting comfortable. He rubbed his bad eye. “I’m thinking, ‘the only thing worse than getting caught is your idol denouncing you.’ I’m thinking… ‘Why don’t we draw him out to me?’”

“Bait,” Jack said, clipped.

“Freddie Lounds is biting at the bit to get me to do an interview. I’ve got four voicemails. We get her to write about me, write about Lecter, and really make Red Dragon mad. Get Chilton in on it, too, let out some stuff about his inability to acquire a soulmate, his impotency, leanings towards things he’d feel as inferior to him –sexuality, appearance, you name it. Two doctors talking about it, one an expert in soulmates, the other an ‘expert’ with criminal psychology? You want him to make a mistake, you gotta make him mad enough to do it, Jack. We’ve gotta make Red Dragon mad.”

Jack started pacing again. This time, Will leaned his head back and stared up at the ceiling rather than track it, letting his eyelids keep track of time. At one hundred blinks, his footsteps trailed to a stop, and Will pulled the straw from his mouth, tying aimless knots into it.

“We do this, I’ve got round-the-clock guard on you. You’re wearing Kevlar.”

“Bullet wounds are headshots on the victims, Jack. He goes for the head.”

“You’re wearing Kevlar,” Jack snapped.

“I’ll wear Kevlar,” Will groused.

“We’ll need to take pictures to make it believable. Will you take pictures?”

Will sighed, like it was the most difficult thing he’d ever been asked to do. “I’ll take pictures.”

“You’re a son-of-a-bitch,” Jack informed him.

Will didn’t have it in him to disagree. Somehow, the lack of fight made Jack anxious, and he shifted from one foot to the other.

“…You have killers in your head all the time, Will. What’s it feel like to have this one, now that it’s…chemical rather than psychological?” he asked when he found the words he’d been fumbling for. After yelling so long, the sudden curiosity was almost laughable.

“Like putting my hands in black paint and pressing it over my eyes,” he said, and he finally looked at Jack, dropping the straw onto the table beside him.

“I’m sorry,” Jack said, and it wasn’t for the cussing.

“Me too,” Will replied.

-

Freddie Lounds handled herself far better than anyone expected. With the aid of an ecstatic Chilton and a resigned Crawford, Will sat down with her and answered questions no honest journalist would ask, phrased his words in a way no true psychiatrist would. Chilton

added in a word or two on the matter, and it became a sort of banter back and forth, the two of them building off of one another's 'theories' on the 'Soul Stealer'.

"He's certainly inbred," Will said.

"Prone to homosexual tendencies," Chilton added in.

Will's contacts remained in. Now that Jack knew, Will had no fear of Chilton. What little ground he'd hoped to gain ahead of Will for his book –Blood and Chocolate, he'd confided in Will –was lost. Not that Will would tell him that, though.

Hannibal was behind a glass wall, and Will didn't like it.

When Freddie pulled out her camera, Will noted the tense stance and expression on Jack's face, and he took great delight in posing as she directed, although he faltered somewhat when she asked about having a photo by the graveside of Mrs. Hess. That was met with a curt no. Chilton couldn't resist stepping in for a few photos, and there was a collective expression of pleasant surprise when Will put an affable hand on Chilton's shoulder.

In the end, Freddie held her hand out to Will, and Jack almost fell out of his chair when Will clasped it firmly and thanked her for her hard work.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for your amazing feedback and absolutely touching messages. Seriously, the only thing more enjoyable than writing this is knowing that you guys seem to love it as much as I do :)

I'm so happy to also see people being pleasantly surprised by it, too! It definitely is different as far as soulmate au's go, and I'm happy to have added that twist for y'all.

Song Inspiration: 'Howl' by Florence & The Machine

One Eye Green, One Black

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 11:

There were seven on the SWAT team, and only one of them had mismatched eyes – one green and one black. Much like the military, the psychiatric evaluations were intense enough that Will was convinced of the man's bearing and mental fortitude without having to actually speak with him. It wasn't until midnight, when the other squad members went to their appropriate placements throughout the hotel and the buildings surrounding that he even bothered to speak to Will, let alone make a conversation of it.

"Coffee?" he asked Will.

"Thanks."

Another silence. This one was broken by the occasional sound of cups scuffing the particle board of the end table, the clearing of throats as Will perused Francis Dolarhyde's patient file.

"I've heard a lot about you," the man said at last, the beginning of real words. Will immediately missed the silence.

"I'll bet."

"Your insight into soulmates has made it possible for people like me to do my job and not get shit for it."

"You're no different than anyone else," Will assured him, and maybe it was his tone that made the man laugh, a curt bark.

"Oh, no, I'm plenty different. I've got a soulmate cross-country right now, and I don't feel a damn lick of pain. What's that say about me?"

"That you build effective forts and barriers within your mind to compartmentalize thoughts, feelings, and ideals into their respective places without the lines blurring," said Will after a moment of thought. "So I'd say you're right; you're plenty different because most people can't do that."

"Can you do that, Dr. Graham?"

"No," he said, surprised at his own honesty.

"Why were you so keen on studying soulmates without having one? What made you care so much about it when it didn't affect you?" the man asked. The Velcro patch on his shirt dubbed him with the last name of Thomas.

"Because it does. The social behaviors, laws, and interactions of people around us due to the general culture of soulmates within our country means that everyone, from the bonded to the seeking to the indifferent, are affected." *And because I wanted to know the many ways in which to avoid one*, he added silently.

"I did some training in Europe for awhile," Thomas said. "Then I was in Asia, working with American ambassadors on security details."

"The statistics for soulmates in eastern countries are vastly different," Will said. "Young aged pairings that aren't realized until the age when the child can communicate their feelings without the use of screaming, then averaging at about thirty years old with large gaps in between."

"Here it's a regular old Romeo and Juliet, what with all of the teenage pairings," Thomas said with a snort. "In South Korea, we were told it was rude to just stare into everyone's eyes, so we didn't. There weren't as many soulmates, at least; if there were, it was hard to tell, kind of like Sweden with all them blue eyes."

"There are many shades of brown, the lighting shifting over each and every one of them; the darker pigment makes it difficult to tell, but they are just as varied as blue and green," Will replied. The thought led him to Francis Dolarhyde, which led him to Red Dragon. Two brown eyes, partial-soulmate.

"It was almost a ceremony for them to date for a long time, then go through the process of looking into one another's eyes. If they didn't feel the connection the next day, then they made the choice to break up or continue dating."

"How are you with your soulmate, Thomas?" Will couldn't help but ask. Silence, the exchange of coffee cups taking turns thudding mutedly onto the table. Thomas' mouth was composed of mostly grimaces and a tad bit of bitterness.

"You know, I heard it so damn long that I really believed it. Soulmates made everything better. Soulmates made everything easy –how could it be hard? You look at someone, they look back, and then you've got your other half right there, making everything okay." Thomas laughed a little, rubbing the stubble at his chin. "Only, they didn't tell you that maybe your soulmate connected with the way you shouted when you got too mad, and they liked to shout, too. They didn't say the connection could be because you both came from bad homes, only you both process those bad homes differently."

They didn't tell you it was because of the darkest parts of your mind finally finding another place equally as horrifying and nestling in to stay.

"Our experiences shape us," Will said. "We are the sum of our parts, our minds, and our past. What we are now is what happened to us before. If you hadn't had the sort of childhood you did, you wouldn't have connected to them."

"The thing is, they *understand* you, Dr. Graham," Thomas said. "That's what makes it feel so right. You can say something just…just so damn bad, and they get it. You say something so damn good, and they get it. It's nice to be known like that."

“Until the knowing is something you wish you didn’t even know,” Will agreed.

“Yeah,” Thomas said, head bobbing. “I thought it was nice in South Korea, with the ceremony and the time it took to see and decide if they wanted to try. It was unique, but it was like…they took it seriously. I don’t think we take it seriously enough, here. I think we just slap our eyes on something, connect, and call it good. Call something that wasn’t a problem, a problem that was now fixed, since you had a soulmate.”

“That is why there is soulmate psychology, same as criminal psychology,” Will said when Thomas didn’t continue. “It’s to further study and take it more seriously, the way it deserves.”

“I guess I’m just saying thank you for doing what you do. You take it seriously, and you see the ugly bits as well as the nice bits. I read one of those psychiatric journals –the one you posted in? I liked it. I thought, ‘this guy’s got it right. He knows, even without having a soulmate, how it’s not suddenly daisies and rainbows just because.’ I think more people should know that. A soulmate doesn’t fix anything, they just make you feel better when the walls start coming down.”

“It is an active choice to have a relationship with your soulmate, Thomas,” Will reminded him lightly. “Same as it’s an active choice to have a relationship with a friend, a brother, or a colleague.”

“I guess that’s why I’m here with you instead of being across the country in Portland with her,” Thomas said. “I made my choice.”

In reality, so had Will.

-

Molly’s face was tired on the screen, and Will wished to smooth the fatigue out from under her eyes.

“You haven’t been sleeping,” she said.

“Neither have you,” he accused.

“It smells like Jack Crawford in here,” she complained, and he smiled a little.

“Oh, Molly,” he murmured affectionately.

“It does,” she affirmed. “He smells like hot feet, Old Spice ‘Swagger’ aftershave, and whatever starch he puts in his collars to make them look so damn crisp.”

“Maybe some scotch guard?”

“A bit of scotch guard, yeah,” she agreed. Her bitterness about Jack radiated in her eyes.

“How is your shoulder?” he asked. The picture pixelated, then showed her again, a baggy tee and hair thrown up in a bun that looked like it’d been done one-handed. Ruffled, rumpled. He wanted to kiss away the strands of hair along her forehead, sweep them back. He didn’t say that, though, in case she hadn’t realized she’d missed a few. He didn’t want to embarrass her.

“It hurts, and the pain medicine knocks me out. I try and hold out because I don’t like falling asleep all the time, but it hurts real bad,” she said.

“Thanks for not lying,” he murmured.

She stared at him, although it was difficult to see the expression through two computer screens and sub-par Wi-Fi. “I could say the same for you, but…”

“But I’m a bastard,” he said.

“You’re not a bastard, but you normally don’t lie, Will.” She shook her head, brushed the strands she’d missed away from her face. “I think that’s what’s got me so…you lied to me, you know.”

“I lied to you,” he agreed. It was a tic just under his eye that twitched: *liar, liar, liar.*

“Why’d you lie to me, huh? That’s what we do, we…tell the truth to each other. Even the ugly ones.”

He couldn’t merge the accusing words barbed with hurt with the frozen expression on the screen. He waited for it to go back to normal, for it to move and show the real Molly. “I was afraid,” he said.

“That I’d leave you?”

“That you’d ask me about them, and I don’t want to talk about them.”

“I do want to ask you about them,” she said.

“I know.”

“But I know you wouldn’t want to talk about them,” she added. “I know what you think, although I don’t know how you get to those thoughts sometimes.”

She didn’t know all of what he thought. “I’m sorry, Molly.”

“Do you see them?” At his stricken expression, she said, “I deserve to know that, at least.”

“Just enough to get the worms out of my skin. Then I leave, and it’s fine.” It’s fine. Like he hadn’t kissed him, like he hadn’t pressed himself against metal bars like some kind of desperate animal, like he hadn’t let Hannibal press gentle, coaxing lips to his open palm, somehow more intimate for the carefulness of the action.

“Okay.” She nodded, accepting it. “Thank you.” She appreciated his honesty, but it wasn’t all honest. It was lies by omission, and Will Graham was really, *really* good at those.

“I choose *you*, Molly. Not a soulmate bond. Always have, always will.”

“You’re one of the few, you know. Do you know how many divorce lawyers try and sue my work because married people who don’t have soulmates find their way to the website and then file for divorce when they find someone?”

“It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy, you know. You go out to find something, chances are that sooner or later you’ll find it.”

Her face froze on a small smile. It glitched, caught up and showed him a pensive stare, head tilted much like Lecter’s.

“How did you get one, then?”

He thought of Hannibal’s grip, tight on his wrist and his eyes that bled triumph. “Sheer, dumb luck,” he murmured. A little bit of manipulation, maliciousness. Coupled with a lifetime of a fractured psyche and an inability to reconcile the pieces of himself that’d bled out from someone else.

She hmm’d, and something on his face seemed to upset her.

“Have you taken your pain medicine?” he asked, aggrieved.

“Not yet,” she said slowly.

“…You should.” He took a sip of the drink just to the side of the laptop, remembering too late she’d see it.

“Is that alcohol?” she asked.

Will didn’t answer. He set it down, moved it out of view.

“What’s in the cup, Will?”

“Whiskey.” Flat. Honest. They told each other the truth, even the ugly truth.

“I’m going to kill Jack Crawford,” she swore, and she leaned back in her chair, rubbing her face. “I’m going to kill Jack Crawford, you’re going to get your killer, and then I’m going to have to get to know you all over again.” A beat. She’d said ‘have to’ like it was a pain, like it wasn’t going to be fun to know him anymore. He could understand that. If he was someone else, he wouldn’t want to know himself, either. “How off of the wagon are you, Will?”

“…You said you’d get to know me all over again, before,” Will said, desperation coloring his tone. “Is that true, Molly? Is that still really, actually true? Do you still want to know me?”

“Yes,” she said slowly. Her lips dragged the word out, made it sound more like a ‘no’. “I keep my promises, Will.”

So did Hannibal. “Okay,” he said quietly, nodding. “…Okay.”

The connection died soon after, and he stared at the background screen of the laptop, a cheerful photo of her standing beside a fountain, his own gaze drawn down to the change floating below the water. She said it made him look ‘soulful’, but in reality, Will had been counting the coins, wondering at the price of wasted dreams.

By the end of his counting, you could waste the dreams of hundreds for about $84.33. Molly just really liked the photo.

-

He got a call early morning, and he sat up to take it with a curse heavy on his lips. “Jack?” he croaked. “Something happen yet?”

“Does he always call you so early?” Hannibal asked.

His voice was a douse of cold water, and he was awake instantly.

“How the hell did you get a phone to call me?” he demanded.

“Dr. Chilton is out, but as you know I’m legally granted access to my lawyer at all times,” he said. Will caught on to his cadence, his purposefully vague speech.

“What, then, would make you call me so early?” Will asked wearily. He fell back onto the bed, pressed his hand over his eyes.

“When you have nightmares, I have nightmares,” he murmured so low that Will almost didn’t catch it. It sounded much like he’d placed his hand over his lips, to distort Chilton hearing what he said. “It’s rather unsettling when one is trying to sleep.”

“You called to wake me up because I was disrupting your sleep,” Will said flatly.

“Among other things,” he mused.

“Hannibal-”

“You were able to match the saliva from the crime scene to Francis Dolarhyde’s DNA, weren’t you?” he asked.

“…Yes. Saliva and blood from my head-butting him.”

“Yes,” Hannibal murmured quietly. “Resourceful of you.”

“You didn’t wake me up for that,” said Will –more of a threat than a statement.

“Have you thought about what sort of psychopath he is? One born with little regard to human life, or one made? Tell me your analysis.”

Were they really doing this? He glanced to the clock by the bed, sighed, and shook his head. Apparently they were doing this.

“…Based on the files and what I’ve seen at crime scenes, I’d say he was made,” Will said slowly. “It’s covetous, something he doesn’t have, something his…upbringing took away from him. That connection to people that was denied at an early age. Coupled with abuse, both physical and mental, I’d imagine. He’d have started with small animals, progressed, wondered.

“He’d have known it was wrong to society, which is why I didn’t bother looking at your serious cases of delusions and scopes of violent patients. He’s smart; he’d have known to keep himself out of trouble in that way.” A beat. “Jack Crawford found your old patient, Tobias Budge. He had intestines in his basement.”

“He was making violin strings out of them, wasn’t he?” Hannibal asked dryly.

“Did you know that?”

“I may have had my suspicions,” he replied casually. “He was always searching for that perfect pitch.”

A pause as they listened to one another breathe. Will rubbed the bad eye and stared up at the ceiling, unsure how he felt about the sense of ease, that they could waste time and listen to one another breathe.

“Were you born, Will, or were you made?” Hannibal wondered.

“…Were you born?” Will asked back, challenging. “Or were you made?”

Another silence, this one heavy with something that made Will want to press the phone tighter to his face. He very much needed to hear the answer.

“I was made, dear Will,” he said at last. “But I do lay claim to a very sturdy foundation from birth that paved a direct path.”

“I’d say…I was born,” Will said bleakly. “A sturdy foundation that only got worse from there.”

“It must have been very lonely for you.” It didn’t sound mocking, although normally Will thought it would have. If anything, it reeked of understanding, of a lifetime of looking away from eyes and struggling to find a way to speak your mind without terrifying everyone in the room. He tried to imagine a young Hannibal, alone with thoughts that may have once repulsed him, terrified him at his capacity to imagine such violence. The image didn’t quite set right in the frame. Not terrified; confused, intrigued. Curious.

“Yes,” Will admitted.

“In your dreams, I noticed that you are always standing alone. You may face someone, you may interact with a demon or shadowed beast, but there is no one at your side. You are always alone.”

“I’m sorry for interrupting your sleep,” Will apologized, dry and not at all serious. “Time takes it away. Moments of intense emotion in dreams would explain why you saw it.”

“Perhaps –and feel free to correct me –your subconscious tired of the sensation of being alone. Our kinship with our unsavory sides, the way in which we utilize it are rather similar, although application on your part does leave much to be desired in terms of finesse; those are well and all, but perhaps that was not enough. You’re a soulmate psychiatrist, Dr. Graham. In sensing the many ways in which we are similar, perhaps your mind made the leap because it was tired of you being utterly alone.”

“Is that to comfort me, or is that to get under my skin?” Will wondered. His mouth and throat were decidedly dry. He wanted to see Hannibal. Hearing, he reasoned, would have to be enough.

“It’s to reassure you that you aren’t alone in your dreams. Whatever demons you’re facing, I am there.”

From Molly, it would have been a comfort. From Hannibal, Will wasn’t sure quite what it was –eerie? His gut clenched, even as a soft, lulling sensation made his eyes close, made his grip slacken somewhat against his ear.

“…Okay,” he said, and that was about as kind as he could make it. “Okay.”

“I was made aware that you saw to it that Matthew Brown was moved from jail to the illustrious Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane,” he said, and his lips seemed to caress the title. “An apt punishment for his crimes, I think.”

“You first cajoled him into those crimes,” Will retorted.

“Only because he was sincere in aiding me. How could I fault him when his only desire was to see me with my soulmate?” His tone lacked sympathy, much as it always did. Underlying it was something else, something ugly that Will recognized as *pride*.

“You thought it was funny that he had a half-connection to me,” Will realized. He shook his head, rubbed his face roughly.

“I wonder just how many people in this world exist with a half-connection to you,” said Hannibal, and Will heard his smile. “I wonder just how many people saw something within you that moved them chemically, and you didn’t react in turn. Are you a heartbreaker, Will?”

“You used him because he was eager to be used.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t blame him for that; I blame you.”

“It’s not *me* you punished though.” Hannibal’s voice lowered, delicately secretive. “You punished him, the one that dared try to connect to you in whatever way he could.”

“Half-connections sometimes cause psychotic breaks that-”

“I know what you told the judge, dear Will, but don’t lie to me. He crossed you, so you taught him a lesson.”

Silence. Will blinked languidly, stared up at the ceiling, then closed his eyes again. Hannibal was looking for the lie, therefore he couldn’t lie and lie well. He swallowed, tasted liquor from the night before. He thought about the smoothie he’d inevitably tossed in the trash, wiping the condensation from its weeping sides on his corduroys. He’d known, even then, that Hannibal would have been proud of him, even if he wasn’t proud of himself.

“Are you rather angry with him?” Hannibal asked.

“…There’s a part of me that pities him,” Will said raggedly.

“What is the other part?”

“Furious that he’d try and intervene with my life; that he’d step up to those bars like I did and try and speak on my behalf.”

“And it was that part that acted, wasn’t it? That decided to teach him a lesson?”

“I’m going to go back to sleep,” he told Hannibal. An assent without having to voice agreement in the slightest. “Don’t make a habit of calling this early. I won’t like it.”

A quiet hum of acquiescence. “Yes, I’d imagine so.”

“Good night, Hannibal.” A pause. “…Thank you.” Whatever the hell that meant.

“Good morning, dear Will,” Hannibal replied. “I’ll take good care of Matthew Brown for you.”

He went to sleep, and when he woke a few hours later, he was disgruntled to realize that rather than waking with bags under his eyes and a crick in his neck, he felt remarkably fine.

-

He sat at his usual park with BBQ Pork Buns and a Jasmine Bubble Tea with Boba. Beside him, Beverly drank her Taro Bubble Tea and positively radiated smug bliss. On the other side, Zeller stoutly refused to partake.

“Zeller thought he found his soulmate, but his eyes didn’t change,” she’d explained to Will, sitting down. “That’s why he’s like this.”

“I didn’t say she was my soulmate,” Zeller protested. At Will’s grimacing smile, he emphasized, “I *didn’t*.”

“You said it was a connection you’d never felt before,” Beverly teased.

“You didn’t bring him along to psychoanalyze me, did you?” Zeller complained.

“I don’t think you could afford what I charge for therapy,” Will lied. He liked to keep his prices mid-range, something for everyone. Although Dr. Avery tried many times to get him to up prices due to the amount of work put in, he reasoned that poor people needed just as much therapy as the rich.

Beverly laughed, delighted.

“I don’t need therapy, I just thought we had a connection,” he grumbled.

Will politely sipped his tea drink with a sealed lid on top boasting a questionably wide-mouthed panda. The air was hot around them, and the name of the game was waiting; waiting on Red Dragon, waiting on Molly to heal, waiting on his eyes to go back to the way they were.

Will would be waiting a long time for that last one.

“Besides, did you see that back there? If Graham and I had soulmates, we could have gotten a discount on drinks. What kind of shit is that? If a place gave discounts just because you *didn’t* have a soulmate, there’d be a boycott, an uproar –Graham, help me out here.” Zeller motioned to him, annoyed at Beverly’s snickering.

“If you want a discount, you could always get colored contacts,” Will said dryly.

“Oh, come on, I’m not that desperate,” Zeller groused.

I am, Will thought.

“It’s not all that it’s cracked up to be,” Beverly attempted to console him. The dimples on either side of her mouth gave her away, though.

“Right, things aren’t just suddenly easy because you have a soulmate,” Zeller scoffed. “Guess who gets more time off? Gets who gets reimbursed for travel because of the ‘emotional tax’ it takes? Who gets their own holidays off, who gets travel packages at better discounts-”

“Who literally almost dies the moment they feel the sudden loss of the person they connected to?” Will cut in. “There is a point when the soulmate is near-death that their partner feels it so acutely that their body thinks that it’s the one dying and attempts to shut down.”

He cast a look to Beverly, who nodded her assent as she sipped her tea.

“It’s a give and take,” he continued ruthlessly. “To make up for the inevitable end.”

That quieted Zeller. He’d known Beverly for a long time, knew her when she’d lost her soulmate. He’d probably been there when she’d first felt the sensation of loss, of

separation so acute it nearly killed her. Will chewed a pork bun morosely and mulled over his own soulmate. He should go see him; reasoned that it would only infuriate him to see him behind the glass wall.

"Do you think Red Dragon is going to go for it?" Beverly wondered in the quiet.

"If so, I've got guys on me." Will nodded to a spot where he noticed one of them posted up. "This is an approved public space. Snipers up on a rooftop, too."

"Jesus Christ," Zeller muttered.

"How comfortable is Kevlar?" Beverly asked.

"Not very." A beat. "If he's serious though, it's a head shot. They'll get him, but he'll get me first."

"You don't sound very concerned," Beverly said.

"I'm not." A lie. He wasn't going to concern them, though, not when it was his idea in the first place. He wouldn't back down, no matter how much sweat stuck to his shirt now that there was an added layer of Kevlar between the undershirt and the plaid.

Just down the hill from them, two people wandered, lost. At visually seeing one another, one let out a shout and the other ran, meeting in the middle where they collided and kissed, the embrace desperate, needing. Will stared, fingers curling into the soft dough unconsciously.

"Get a room," Zeller muttered.

"First meeting after the connection?" Beverly asked Will.

Will frowned, chewed nice and slow. He washed the food down, wiped his mouth, nodded. "They've found each other. Didn't know where to go 'till they got there."

He thought of Molly and how she'd kissed him in the café they met at the next day. He'd called her as early as was acceptable, checking and re-checking his eyes in the mirror. Two seafoam blue. She answered the phone, breathless, asked him to meet her somewhere.

Two brilliant baby blues.

She'd kissed him with the relief, made his skin go cold but his breath speed up. She apologized, he apologized, and they ate their sandwiches and sipped Italian sodas, peeking glances at one another in between bouts of looking out of the window. When she went to leave, he asked her out to dinner.

"You think it's always like that?" Zeller asked. He too couldn't look away, a sense of longing that Will felt on the tip of his nose and down to his feet.

"No," Will said. He'd given enough therapy that Zeller wasn't going to argue his reply.

“I was mad,” Beverly said with a grin. “I’d been dating someone else, then this one comes along and just threw that out of the water. The guy I’d been dating said he wasn’t going to date someone with a soulmate –what if he missed his own chance because of me? I told him no way, but you know how it goes.”

“How’s it go?” Zeller prompted.

“You think about them a lot. You want to touch them a lot, and it makes the thoughts go away when you do. You want to hear their voice, you want them to like you; when they’re upset you get upset because you want it all to be perfect for them. So you hold hands once, and you speak so that you can hear their voice. You reason it makes sense, ease the feeling in your fingers. You fight their battles because only you can keep them safe, in your mind. Then next thing you know, it just…feels right to be with them. Why anyone else?”

“That’s a little unromantic,” Zeller said.

“There’s nothing romantic about chemical compounds holding you hostage to your desires,” Will said thinly.

Will thought of Thomas, pained by the connection to his soulmate being their anger and their childhood. He thought of Hannibal calling him early in the morning to reassure him that even in his worst dreams, he wasn’t alone. He thought of Molly on the train, crying because she had her own dreams and aspirations and was so scared they’d all be ruined.

“People say it just makes things easier,” Zeller said. “I guess that’s why I’m waiting for mine.”

“It doesn’t make it easier,” Will told him from around his pork bun. “It just adds one more line of code.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all of your love! You guys are just so fantastic!

As I said in the notes in Magnum Opus, I will be moving later this week, so I don't think I'll have an update ready within my normal 5-6 day period as it is crunch time and I've got much to do/pack! I appreciate your patience with me, and I when I get over there, I expect to resume my normally scheduled writing/posting!

I don't know why, but the idea of Will Graham drinking Bubble Tea casually literally just warms my heart and no one can take that head canon away from me.

Song Inspiration: "Nothing's Gonna Hurt You Baby" by Cigarettes After Sex

Two Burning Hazel Eyes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 12:

In his dreams, he lay in sinking sand. He didn't resist, and when flower petals were gently laid across his eyelids, his nose, and his lips, he allowed it. Each breath he took sunk him a little bit lower, but he was relieved to find that as long as he was sinking, they were too. He pressed palm to waiting, wanting palm, and he sighed.

-

He got a call two days later from Johns Hopkins Hospital at approximately 7:42 A.M. Jack's voice was curt, clipped. Aggrieved.

"He didn't go after you. He went after Chilton."

The video from surveillance didn't give them a view of the vehicle used to transport Chilton, but it did give them a blurred, grainy image of Dolarhyde wheeling him to the top of the hill beside the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, lighting him on fire and pushing the tall-backed wheelchair hard enough to get it going.

Jack didn't know there'd be audio, but Will did –Chilton wired things his own way, after all. He hovered in the doorway and nodded to Jack to play it. While the screams of agony disintegrated to crackling whimpers of pain, Jack grimaced and stepped out to make a call. Will rewound it and let it play again, watching the way the sounds filled the entire room and sucked up everything with it. He played it a third time. He played it a fourth time. He swallowed so hard that it physically hurt. Each time he played it, he stayed in the doorway so that it didn't devour him.

"He may not live, and that's something I need to prepare you for," the doctor told them in the hallway. The burn unit was quiet, apart from hurried steps and mechanical beeps and whirs of constant machinery. "We're going to do the best we can, but he's in a lot of pain, and really I don't feel it's that important for you to question him."

"The one that did this is a serial killer," Jack said bluntly. "We're trying to keep him from doing this to anyone else."

Will didn't bother trying to reason with the doctor –he left that grunt work to Jack. Hospitals took him to dark places, places where the walls were grey and didn't reflect anything more than the dour circumstances occurring within them, bouncing back the negative until it was all Will could see, all that he could ingest. Down the hall, someone sat on a chair and cried silently, shoulders heaving with the effort. They weren't screaming; not a soulmate, then. People whose soulmate had just died screamed and screamed and screamed with the pain of it. He thought about Chilton's screams and gnawed on the corner of his lip.

Cold fingers pressed unconsciously to the scarring along his neck, and he turned to look at a painting of the hospital, a small dedication etched into a gold plate below it. The last time he'd been in a hospital, Molly almost died. The time before, he'd almost died. There was a negative connotation to them, something that smacked of life and death being cradled within the same palm, a child too eager to squeeze to see which one fell out between the cracks of his pudgy knuckles.

"Will?" He looked back at the sound of his name, and Jack had his hands stuffed into his pants' pockets. "Where's your head?"

"Is he going to let us see Chilton?" Will asked.

"He said Chilton managed to ask for you, in between putting him under to help with the pain. He'll let us in since you're who Chilton asked for." The dip between Jack's brows was set-in, deep from many years of bad news and worse coping mechanisms. Will had the wild urge to brush it away.

"He went after Chilton, not me," Will said.

"Where's your head?" Jack repeated.

"Decidedly not on fire," he replied. They stared one another down, and Will pushed out a breath of unease. "I'm fine."

The room reeked of antiseptic and charred skin. Will walked with trepidation, aware of each footfall and the sound of the material of his khakis rubbing together at the thighs. The room was cool, cooler than outside in the hall, and the deep-set tub Chilton had been placed in to aid in regulating oxygen and fluids was even colder to the touch. Will passed his hand along the side of it, then drew away, guilty.

He didn't have to steel himself to see the gristly image, but he did have to prepare for the sight of his lipless mouth. They hadn't mentioned that part, the lips missing like they'd been ripped off by some great, ugly beast. No, no; a Great Red Dragon. His nose itched, and Will scratched it, ignoring the pointed look Jack gave him at the movement.

"Frederick, it's Agent Jack Crawford and Dr. Graham," Jack said, and the eyelids, blessedly still in place, flickered. At a deep, pained inhale, the smell of burnt flesh was nauseating.

"I'm sorry this happened to you," Will said quietly. Chilton's teeth flashed white against the black and red. His eyes opened, and he fixed a pained stare on Will that seared him.

"Yu…seh…ne uh," he rasped, muffled and agonized. Will balked under the accusing hazel eyes. "Yu nu…he sah ee az ah het."

"What's he saying?" Jack asked. "Can you tell?"

“Yu uut yor hand on ee…ike a hucking het,” he managed, and a shudder ran along his body, his eyes rolling back into his head.

Will stared down, dispassionate. “You set me up. You knew he’d see me as a pet. You put your hand on me like a fucking pet.”

“Both the Hess’ and the Panters’ had pets,” Jack murmured.

“Not anymore,” said Will quietly.

“Did you see anything, Dr. Chilton?” Jack asked.

Chilton struggled for words, eyes half-lidded. “1L-8432B. 1L-8432B. 1L-8432B. 1L-8432B. 1L-8432-”

He continued chanting it in a low, harsh undertone until the doctor saw them out so that they could bring him under again. Will paced in the hall, and Jack tracked his movements.

“Is that true, Will?” Jack asked. Will stuffed his hands into his pockets and grimaced at the too-clean floors.

“Did I set him up? Did I put my hand on him like a fucking pet?”

“Did you?”

“He wouldn’t have believed it if I didn’t. He’d have thought it was posed, but for me to reach out, I…” Will raked his hands through his hair, falling back against the wall. His lungs felt too big for his chest. “I had to make it believable. I wasn’t trying to make him a target.”

Silence. The only kind of silence you could have in a hospital, which was to say not very. There were always people moving, machines going, people dying –to say one couldn’t hear the sound of the dead was to say one wasn’t Will Graham, and he could hear it very, very well. He focused on breathing, on compartmentalizing, on not hearing the sound of Frederick Chilton dying.

I’ve got my guys hunting down the license plate number he saw,” Jack said at last. “It’s probably a fake, but he may not have swapped it out in time.”

“Tattler posted that just a few days ago,” Will said heavily. “That’s not long to get this done and done. Taken care of. He’d had a plan like this for a long time, looked at that high-backed chair for a long time.”

“I’m not following,” Jack said.

“He didn’t just go find it, you know?” Will rubbed his face, scratched at the spaces where Chilton’s eye at been visible, even when closed. “That’s an old chair, an old place. He looked at it a long time, thought what it’d be to light it up. He thought about that chair, saw that chair.”

“You think he’s either owned it, or knew someone that owned it?” Jack asked.

“Common enough to see him wheeling it around wouldn’t be a big deal. Chilton wrapped up, I bet it looked mighty like an old person, sedated and drooling.”

“And only a few days to get here, take him and make it happen,” Jack mused. “I’ll start checking old folk’s homes. Something closeby, something close enough for Baltimore and Minnesota, and a van big enough to wheel him around in.”

Once Jack was gone, Will scuffed his shoes all the way down the hall, starting at the door to Chilton’s room and ending at the elevator. He looked back at the small black marks, and he nodded to himself. From his sins to him, it took precisely forty-two black scuff marks.

-

Barney sat at the cage to maximum, and he stared down at the envelope in Will’s hand with a calm, detached expression.

“I know Matthew wasn’t the only one,” Will said. “You spied on me for Chilton, now I’m asking for a favor that will pay better than his hourly.”

“And just what kind of favor is that, Dr. Graham?” Barney asked.

“Nothing untoward. No video, no audio. Twenty minutes.”

“I could lose my job,” Barney said.

“The one that’d take your job is currently missing 90% of his skin,” Will replied impassively. “He won’t think to know, if he even lives.”

If Barney was troubled by the ease in which he discussed his boss’s potential demise at the hands of Red Dragon, he didn’t show it. He eyed the envelope, took it from Will calmly and opened it, counting the money; after he finished he counted again. He sighed, squinted at the multiple screens of monitors, and after a deliberate nod of his head, he pressed a few buttons. The screen that Will eyed in particular went black.

“He’s still in his glass cell,” he told Will as he unlocked the doors.

“I assumed as much.”

Without partitions, the entire hall was open to Will as he looked about. No other inmates could see him, but he still felt exposed as he set the chair down and looked at Hannibal’s back. He stood facing his blank wall where the art once was, like he could imagine where each sketch once resided.

“Word travels fast, Will,” Hannibal said after a moment.

“Even in maximum?”

“Especially in maximum. Orderlies, nurses, cooks…the silence in this hall after medication leaves echoes that bounce about, caught within this renovated cell of mine. Poor Dr. Chilton, victim of the Great Red Dragon. Victim of Will Graham, too, I’d imagine.”

He turned around, and Will wasn’t surprised to see a small, delighted smile that belied the calm measures of his voice.

“We have twenty minutes,” Will said.

“Clever Dr. Graham,” Hannibal praised. “Outsmarted by Chilton, so he finds colorful ways to not only attempt to draw out our little killer, but punish the administrator that has your soulmate locked up, too. A delightful coup in one fell swoop.”

Silence. Will chewed his words around, dwelling on the niggling whisper in his ear at how good it felt to see Hannibal so utterly *proud* of him. It radiated off of him, like some god damn Christmas tree lights. He wanted to shove the feeling away, lock it up with the rest of his ugly thoughts, but he found himself relishing in it, a warm hum in his stomach.

“Dr. Chilton thinks I set him up,” Will said. “I didn’t.”

“You did,” Hannibal replied amiably. “The same way you attempted to set me up, the difference being that Chilton was not smart enough to see.”

“I didn’t know that he’d see Chilton as a pet,” Will protested.

“Didn’t you?” Hannibal purred. “For the name of a man that was able to keep Barney’s nephew out of juvenile detention, I was able to see the newspaper article, dear Will. A hand on the shoulder, a gesture of comradery between two doctors? He killed the pets first, and your claim by touch privilege made Dr. Chilton your pet.”

They stared one another down, Will focusing more on the maroon eye rather than the blue. A sliver of guilt wormed down his spine, settled low and painful like he’d slept funny.

“What had you told me?” Hannibal wondered out loud. “How good it felt for you to do bad things to bad people? Dr. Chilton surely regrets getting on your naughty list, my dear.”

“Let’s entertain the thought that hypothetically, that’s exactly what I did,” Will rasped out.

“I can do that,” Hannibal assured him.

“Will it have the intended effect?”

“It may, but then again it may not. He’s shy, after all, and you’d need to make a bit more of a public appearance if you wanted to draw him into the light of day. After this, I doubt Jack Crawford will allow you in such a place without at least seven men around you at all times, much less a place where you could sit down to chat with the man.”

“Then it ultimately failed,” Will said, and he lowered his head to rub the furrows out of his brow. A headache coiled in his temple, as painful as it was welcomed. Maybe if he continued to feel guilt over Chilton, it’d absolve him of the actions taken that’d killed the man.

May have killed the man. The verdict was still up in the air.

“You have another idea, though, otherwise you wouldn’t have come here. You didn’t come to me to get a pat on the back and a gold star for wallowing in the beautifully darker aspects of your person. You can do that without me. I’ve seen your dreams.”

“You know nothing of my dreams,” he said.

“I have seen every single one of your dreams since the night we first connected.”

“You haven’t,” Will snapped, neck hot. “Maybe some, but not all of them.”

“In sands we sink, in fields of poppy I brush shards of glass from your hair, and before mirrors I hold the very pieces of you that you resent most of all,” Hannibal said, staring him down intently. “You hold a blade to your neck, and I suture back the skin that you dared sunder.”

Will looked down, embarrassed. He’d felt the first intrusions of Hannibal in his dreams after the initial connection; it hadn’t occurred to him to ask if Hannibal still found himself seeing *all* of them. Uncommon, but not impossible. Perhaps the lack of consistent physical and visual contact made his mind reach out in other ways, desperate. When he’d called on the phone, Will half-suspected it as him playing mind games, but maybe not.

Had he actually been attempting to genuinely *comfort* him, of all the fucking things?

“Does it make you uncomfortable to think that even now, I can see the parts of you that you dearly wish to ignore?” Hannibal asked.

“It will fade,” Will assured him. “Your dreams will be your own again.”

“On the contrary, I enjoy seeing this aspect of you. The Will Graham that you hide away behind such a hard, stoic mask is far more entertaining and enlightening. I find him interesting. I find his dark humor, his willingness to do what is necessary utterly refreshing. Far more interesting than the innocent, demure, uncertain man that you portray to the public with your aversion to eyes and your grief therapy.”

“…Glad to entertain,” Will managed dryly.

“I’m curious about the dreams where you try to take your own life. It’s not you that you’re trying to kill, is it? I always sense the self-loathing, but you find yourself too useful to just…bite the bullet. You'd only do something like *that* if it served a purpose.”

“We’re not going to talk about that.”

“Quid pro quo, dear Will. You have an idea, and I may have enlightenment.”

“We have less than twenty minutes, Hannibal, I-”

“Shouldn’t argue with me, then,” Hannibal replied, voice carrying over Will’s smoothly. “Time is ticking.” Will gritted his teeth and looked up to the infuriatingly amused expression.

“…It’s more of…a memory,” he admitted after a beat. He unconsciously rubbed the scar tissue at his neck, under the collar of his shirt.

“I’d have been uncertain of that before, but before Dr. Chilton found it necessary to take away any ‘privileges’ he’d granted me, I did read the other article the dastardly Freddie Lounds wrote about you.” Lecter said ‘dastardly’ like one said ‘daring’ or ‘adventurous’. There was an undertone of almost-affection, of history.

“Freddie Lounds writes trash,” Will growled.

“She’s certainly taken a dislike to you, hasn’t she?” Lecter waved a hand lightly when Will opened his mouth. “It made me look at other articles, ones regarding the Minnesota Shrike and your lovely work with him. You were admitted into a psychiatric institution in November of 2014. A suicide risk whose wrists were strapped down. It wasn’t a suicide attempt, though, was it?”

“…No,” Will murmured.

“You thought you were killing Garrett Jacob Hobbs again.”

“…Yes.”

“A severe depressive episode after having to use deadly force on a person you were only going to interview, coupled with the way that you were able to so aptly crawl into the spaces between the breaths of a killer and find yourself there with them,” he concluded. “You were released after two weeks, but the damage by our dear Miss Lounds had been done.”

“Why make me answer when you already know?” Will asked, agonized. He looked away from Hannibal and pressed his face into his hands, letting out a quiet, sharp hiss of breath.

“Is that the only life you’ve ever taken?”

“Yes.”

“And after taking it, it festered inside of you so grotesquely that you lost the taste for consulting on psychological profiles.”

“Yes.”

“He wasn’t the only one to lay down beside you at night, when dreams unfolded, but he was the only one you were unable to pry from your skin in the aftermath.”

“I’m going to do something, Hannibal, and I need assurance of your utmost cooperation,” Will said, looking back up at him again. Rather than the amusement from before, he was uncomfortable to see something almost akin to sympathy on his face. He gritted his teeth and glared. “Can you give me that?”

“Assurance of my utmost cooperation,” he echoed back to him. “Is this something Jack Crawford would approve of, dear Will?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“…Don’t tell me, then,” Hannibal decided. “I want to be surprised.”

“You want to be surprised?” Will’s brows lifted, and he scratched the back of his head.

“Yes. As much as I would enjoy knowing, there is something satisfying about the idea that you don’t need me to make these dark little machinations. You make enough morally grey, ambiguous decisions all on your own, dear Will.”

Will nodded, and silence fell between them, something smacking of bad decisions and tasting like the aftermath of a lightning strike. Will stood and walked to the glass that separated them, and he sat down on the concrete floor, back pressed tight against it. He straightened his shoulders, glanced to his watch, and sighed quietly.

“Five minutes,” he told Hannibal.

He wasn’t quite sure how he knew, but he was very much aware when Hannibal copied his movements, back pressed to the barrier, heartbeat steady. Will imagined that even with the glass between them, he could feel his heartbeat syncing with his own, and he tilted his head back to look at the ceiling.

“Something is changing inside of me,” he revealed.

“Changing?”

“Like I’m not in my own skin. Someone else is in my skin.”

“They were always there, Will,” Hannibal objected kindly. Will resented the kindness. “Growing, shifting perhaps, but don’t lie to yourself and say that it was never there. I preferred it better when you stared me in the eye and told me you’d kill yourself if it meant that I hurt, too. I believed that far more easily than your claims that you were any form of innocence before you walked down this hall and met me.”

Silence. Silence was best. Will nodded along to Hannibal’s words, found his own burning self-loathing embedded in the very real threat. He didn’t want Hannibal to hurt, though. That in itself was far more terrifying than taking a knife to his throat again.

At five minutes, he stood up and walked away without looking back. He did pause, though, at the empty cell that was normally occupied by Dr. Abel Gideon. He frowned at it,

puzzled, then stopped at the cage where Barney waited, eyes lazily tracking the seconds ticking on the clock by the computer.

"What happened to Abel Gideon?" he asked.

Barney looked like he wasn't going to answer, but he sighed quietly. Maybe there was a bit of guilt in his spying on Will –maybe a bit of understanding at Will's situation. "He's in solitary."

"Why?"

Barney's expression soured. "He killed Matthew Brown, that's why."

Will blinked and struggled not to let his emotions show. It was a sucker punch, though, and he had to take a slow, uneven breath as he gaped at Barney, blinking contact-covered eyes, doe-like in expression to belie a dark, wicked tendril that unfurled in him.

"…How…did that happen?" he asked slowly.

"He complained of stomach pains –been having stomach pains for a while," he said, and his glare darkened. "Matthew Brown was getting a physical at the time. Gideon overpowered the nurse, by the time we got in there the bastard had him impaled on an IV stand with her on top. Eyes gone."

Will forced himself to nod, although he could feel his heartbeat behind his eye. Matthew Brown, dead. Gone. No half-connection told him of the loss; he dazedly wondered if Gideon had thought to merely destroy the eyes or if he'd hidden them like Matthew had.

"I'm sorry," he managed, and Barney shook his head. Grief soured his lips, made his brow dip down low.

"I know he did wrong by you, Dr. Graham, but this…these bastards are animals," he said, voice heavy with unshed tears. "He didn't deserve to go like that; not by Abel-fucking-Gideon."

Will thought to tell him he didn't know Gideon would do that, but a quick breath held the words in. The worst way to sound guilty was to try and not sound so god damn guilty.

"No one deserves to go like that," he said instead. "…I'm sorry."

"You were just trying to get him the help he needed. No sorry necessary," Barney replied.

He nodded to Barney and left the institute, hating the stark realization that no matter how much he tried to think it was someone else inside of his skin, the fact of the matter was that he was very much in control of everything he did.

Things like Matthew Brown's death included.

-

Molly called him that night, while he lay in bed and stared at the ceiling. He thought about not answering, but he reasoned that his stained and ugly skin wouldn't reach her through the phone. He washed his hands before answering, just in case. He thought of Matthew Brown's eyes and Gideon's compliments to Will's use of politeness. He didn't have to be kind to Gideon, but he was. He didn't have to be cruel to Matthew, but he was.

"The town this safehouse is in boasts a 'soulmates day' where the kids who have already found their soulmate skip school and go to a large fair in town," she informed him.

"Appalling," he murmured.

"The adults think it's quaint, and they don't say anything about it. If someone without a soulmate shows up, they're asked to leave."

"Is the population under 20,000?"

"How'd you guess?" she said sarcastically. A beat. "I'm going mad here."

"I'm sorry," he said, and he rolled onto his side. Red Dragon's shadowed outline lay beside him, staring back with no eyes.

"You say that every time, Will. Every time we're on the phone."

"It in no way lessens how much I mean it."

Silence. A quiet, soft noise, much like the sound one makes when they're trying to withhold a sob. "…I know. I know, Will, I'm sorry. I just get so mad sometimes, you know?"

"I deserve it."

"Not at you, at…at me. At Jack Crawford, at the fucking FBI, at the maniac that did this. Then sometimes at you, for having such a need to help people that you'd risk yourself like this. At me, that I saw that and still told you that you should, said you should just… fucking help people. That you risked yourself like this, and now you've…" Her voice trailed off. She tried again, then fumbled, and the noise radiated against Will's teeth.

"How's your shoulder?" he asked when she couldn't continue.

"It's fine, it's fine," she said, brushing away his concern like cobwebs. "I'm thinking that I'm going to go to my parents, Will."

"Your parents?"

"They're four hours from here, and they want to come get me. They don't want me cooped up like this, and mom says she wants to see my shoulder for herself, make sure I'm okay."

"I don't know if-"

“I already bought the ticket,” she interrupted. “I told them not to come get me when I’ve got a ticket and a plane will be better on my shoulder than a car ride. I leave in two days.”

“Oh, Molly,” Will sighed, and he closed his eyes tightly, pressing a palm to them. “Molly, it’s not safe.” He was just saying it to say it, though. She’d already bought the ticket. She’d already decided.

“I’m going to be okay. He couldn’t get me, so he’s going to try and get you, right? He won’t try and find me.” She sounded confident in that. “Besides, if the truth gets out about you having a soulmate, I wouldn’t matter anymore. He’d go after the soulmate, not me.”

There was the sensation that he’d been gutted by those words, and he stayed silent for several moments, letting the pain spread. He reminded himself that he deserved this. He thought of Matthew Brown, told himself that he definitely deserved this.

“He’s nothing compared to you,” he managed, and god he sounded so fucking pathetic.

“A he,” she mused, and he shuddered at the sudden sound of a cold laugh. “I wondered if you’d tell me more. Are you going to tell me more about him, Will?”

“I hate him,” Will said. “I want to be with you.”

“Oh, Will, but you ache for him, don’t you? It hurts, right, baby?”

Too many new terms of endearment from her. He preferred her better in the mornings after they’d made love, when she teased him and called him ‘honey bunches’. He always scrunched his nose at it then, but he’d kill a man to hear it now. Will sat up in bed and shook his head like she could see, like he could show her just how much he wanted it to be untrue.

“Molly, I don’t want him, I want you. We choose each other, right? That’s what makes us so right for each other? We choose, and that’s why it’s so god damn great with you. I want to be home with you. No matter who or what crawled into my brain, it’d always be you. In a thousand lifetimes, I’d always *choose* you.”

“Do you remember when we first met eyes on that stupid train, and I started crying because I thought, ‘this is it. This is how God gets me.’?”

“Yeah, yeah.” Will nodded emphatically. He’d been too awkward to be a real comfort, patting her shoulder at arm’s distance before passing her a tissue when she didn’t stop. He managed to get her number and stumbled from the train, dazed and afraid.

“…Then we chose each other after because it made sense. We weren’t going to be forced, so we should date.”

“We choose each other, every time,” Will said, heart pounding. It was going to be okay. It was going to be *okay*.

"…I think I need to think a lot about if I want to keep choosing, Will. I think that I need some time to think if I want to keep choosing someone that was chosen by someone else."

Oh.

"Oh."

"I still love you, but I've got two blues, and you don't anymore. It's not your fault, I don't…blame you, but I've just gotta think about it for a bit, okay?"

"…Yeah. Yeah, okay, Molly." Will nodded. He nodded harder when she didn't speak, and as the silence built on the crackly line, he dipped his head down, pressed his forehead to his knee and let out a sharp, silent sob of breath. "Okay, Molly. Okay."

"Are you breathing, Will?"

"I'm breathing," he managed, and he looked up at the ceiling like he could see the cracks forming that'd send it crashing down on him. "I…I'm sorry, Molly."

"Oh, Will," she said, and it undid him. He set the phone down and curled up, arms wrapped tight around his knees as he trembled all over, trying to stifle the noises that kept falling out of his mouth. When he couldn't quite get control of himself, he slapped at the phone screen and hit end, and he stood up, pacing the confines of the hotel room to expel the terror that was quickly working its way up his shins, his thighs, his hips, his back, to his neck where breath came short, where small gasps went to die.

"You took her from me," he said to the shadow of Red Dragon sitting cross-legged on his bed. "You took her from me, you god damn…*you took Molly away from me*!" he shouted, and he grabbed the picture frame boasting the drink specials of the week from the entertainment center, launching it at the bed. It smacked against the headboard, fell limply to the pillow with a soft noise. The shadow didn't move, didn't speak. Will fell to his knees and hit at the floor, gasping for breath, gasping for a shred of something that didn't make him feel like he was dying all over again.

"I'm going to kill you," he seethed into the carpet, inhaling the taste of dust bunnies and dirty shoes. "I'm going to fucking *kill* you."

Chapter End Notes

So only a couple of days late! Boom. I'm pretty proud, to be honest. :) In reality, it took another hour for the movers to get there, so I just moved on and finished this guy up, so all I had to do when I got here and needed a breather between stacks of boxes was edit!

Thank you guys so much for your love and energy that you've brought to reading this. Honestly, reading your comments and your appreciation just warms my heart! Reading

that some of you try and hold out commenting but couldn't, that some normally hate soulmate au's but were floored by this one, that some generally wait for a finished fic before reading; to see that somehow this fic brought you around just stuns me beyond belief! You guys are so amazing, and I'm so happy to share my work with you.

Song Inspiration: 'Sound of Silence' by Simon and Garfunkel

One Trusting Maroon, One Conniving Blue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 13:

Alana greeted him the next morning at his door, before he'd remembered to put his contacts in. Sleep and the ugly stench of alcohol clung to him, even as he took in her appearance with slow, languid blinks of his ugly, mismatched eyes. He didn't have it in him to be ashamed, at the moment. By proxy, he'd killed a man just a day or so ago. By proxy, he'd almost killed another man a day or so ago. By the hands of psychopaths, he'd kill them all if they weren't careful.

"Good morning, Will," she said, and she met his gaze, her own unflinching. She'd been prepared.

"Jack send you after me?"

"He called after you sent two of your security detail to make sure Molly got to her parents safely," she explained kindly. After a beat, she reached up and brushed back an unruly curl, and her expression softened. "Can I come in?"

Will grunted and allowed her entry, swallowing the aftertaste of whiskey that perched on the far back part of his tongue.

If she cared about the disarray of the room, she said nothing. He'd thrown a few more things, things too soft to break. He'd accidentally sent the table on its side when he'd tried to grab the whiskey bottle again, somewhere in between his shouting at Red Dragon and his pained silence as he glowered at nothing in particular. The closed and almost empty bottle lay abandoned beside the table whose legs stuck out petulantly. Matthew Brown stood at the end of his bed, accusing. His eyes were missing. He didn't have Will's eye anymore; that was for fucking sure.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Alana asked.

"…Jack told you everything?"

"I think I can see everything, Will," Alana said, not unkind. She found her way to the chair Will had finally managed to fall asleep on, and she perched just at the edge of it, surveying him. "How long were you going to wait until you told me?"

"I thought to reveal it at the wedding," Will said, sitting on the edge of the bed. He rubbed the nape of his neck and scowled at the floor. The beginnings of a hangover tickled at his temples. He thought about Matthew staring at him in the courtroom, nodding. He'd allow this. He'd wanted to be as close to Will as a half-connection could be.

He'd found out just how awful it was to get too close.

"Yours to Molly, or-"

"Molly's pausing me," Will interrupted, not wanting to hear the tone of thinly veiled derision when Alana mentioned Hannibal. "She's pausing us, and a pause is just the time before the end. A breath. An inhale before an exhale. The longer the pause, the more inevitable the end. So she's saying it's a pause, but a pause is what you did to us before you ultimately dumped me, too."

"You're not angry at her, though," Alana noted.

"Oh hell, I can't fault her for that. If I was her, I wouldn't want anything to do with me, either. I wouldn't even pause, I'd just…" He gestured, limbs limp like the cut strings to a marionette. "Molly's…better than me."

"She's not better than you, Will."

"I fucking bonded to a serial killing cannibal, Alana," he bit out, and he was pleased to see the twitch of her shoulder –good god, a reaction. He wanted a reaction, and he'd gotten it. He wondered what she'd say if he revealed how he'd had a hand in Matthew Brown's death. Despite solitary, Gideon must have been tickled pink. "How much worse can it get than that? He took one look at me, and he knew he'd…he knew it'd get under my skin to make me see his eyes, make me see just how perfectly controlled and…in command of himself, he is. Turns out, they got under too far."

"You of all people know how tricky connections with soulmates can be. You've been in dark places, and you've distanced yourself from those dark places the moment that you were able to. It makes sense that the next time you looked at someone who's also dwelled in places like that, your mind would react to it. A connection it hasn't seen before. You've spent so long avoiding eyes, it was the first pair you've seen in how long?"

It made sense, coming from her. It made it sound so much better than it was, that he'd first woke with the dizzying sensation that if he could only *touch* Hannibal, everything would suddenly be okay.

"…I don't want it," he said at last, when he could curl his tongue the way he needed it to. "I don't want this."

"Because a soulmate makes you feel out of control?" Alana asked.

"I didn't *choose* this," he said, plaintive. He looked at Alana and shuddered. "I don't want these thoughts in my head anymore. You know him, Alana. You know how…do I even have to say this? To you, of all people? You know what thinking like this does to me. What I *do* when I think like this."

"I know that you're a good person. I know that you've gone through enough in life that the last thing you need is to beat yourself up about this. I know that it isn't ideal that he is who you connected to, but I also know that you are in enough control of yourself that you're

going to come out of this okay." She spoke with such calm, measured conviction. Will wondered dazedly how long she'd had to prepare, how quick Jack had been to rat him out to her. How could she say such things in regards to Hannibal Lecter?

"I don't feel okay," he admitted at last. He swallowed back bile that smacked of too much liquor roiling in his stomach. "I don't feel in control of myself."

"That's why I'm here, Will," she said gently. "I'm your friend, and I'm here."

She stood and crossed over to the bed, sitting down beside him so that she could wrap her arms around him. Be it his starvation for contact, his need to connect to someone other than the person that hummed along his arteries and capillaries, Will found himself clinging to her tightly, burying his head in her shoulder like he could somehow rid himself of the feeling of Hannibal's hands caressing his back to try and take the hurt away.

-

"You said you had an idea, Will," Jack said when they made it to the office.

It'd taken time, Alana forcing him to shower, shave, and clean himself up. When he'd finally emerged from the bathroom, contacts in and face smelling of hotel aftershave, he found that Alana had cleaned and picked up the hotel room, nary a fold of a blanket out of place. She'd appraised him from her place by the now righted table, and she'd deemed him worthy of the public eye.

"Yeah," Will said, sitting down. He noted Alana's leg just close enough to brush against his, a presence she would keep close to ensure he felt supported. He wondered if Matthew Brown felt supported by the metal rod he'd been impaled on.

The office was large, but everything felt too small to him. He worried over his bottom lip, biting at dead skin; he shifted and peeked out of the clear glass doors that revealed harried agents hurrying to and fro in their work. He twitched and scratched an itch at the back of his neck. Whatever Hannibal was doing, he was quite at peace with it. His desire to be surprised by Will was as unsettling as it was exciting –he hadn't mentioned that to Alana.

"The last idea sent Dr. Chilton rushing to the hospital," Jack reminded him, pulling him back into the room.

"I thought he'd come for me," said Will, grinding the heel of his shoe into the carpet.

"Me too," Jack admitted.

"Then I thought, I'm not the end-all, Lecter is. Red Dragon wants Lecter to be his final piece to his becoming, the death of the master for the strength of the pupil. We used me as bait, but…" Will shrugged. Dug his heel in harder. Molly was at her parents by now, eating breakfast or taking pain medication for the shoulder she couldn't move. She paused him. They were paused. Hannibal had surely felt his pain at being paused. Maybe Hannibal had felt his pain at the sensation of realizing he was far better at being bad to bad people than he should be. Maybe he'd felt his dark sense of joy instead.

“But?” Jack prompted.

“I think Hannibal Lecter would make the best bait,” Will finished. “I think if Red Dragon got wind that Lecter was out, he’d spread his fucking wings and come at him like a freight train, he’d be so happy to snap him up.”

Silence. Not the condemning kind, but certainly not the awed kind. After the silence seemed to only grow, Jack sighed, leaned back in his chair, and his mismatched eyes surveyed Will with something akin to disgruntled appraisal.

“Why would he want to meet him so badly?” Alana wondered.

“In their sessions together, Lecter got into his head –really, *really* got into his head,” Will said. He didn’t mention how poetic it’d been, reading pages upon pages of prose, words that sprung from Lecter’s lips like a spell woven in the air between them. “Talked about how good it’d feel to kill, talked about…how his urges were natural, and why, why…why fight them? He talked about the inevitable, the becoming, and the change. He twisted Dolarhyde up into this knot so tight that he needed Lecter to keep his head on straight, then Lecter was arrested. It sent him over. He needs Lecter, admires Lecter, and wants to certainly kill Lecter.”

“How are you thinking, then?” Jack asked. He was listening –good.

“Did you find a place with that chair?” Will asked.

“A nursing home out of a run-down place in Maine. Zeller said you owe him for how long it took him, but I said-”

“It didn’t take him long, and that’s a compliment,” Will cut in. He motioned for Jack to continue.

“…Right. They had a man that they confirmed looked like Dolarhyde working as a nurse’s aid with the elderly. Gave a two weeks, never showed up for his last two weeks.” Jack frowned impressively. “The basement had a few chairs like that, though they couldn’t be sure if one was missing.”

“One was missing,” said Will impatiently. “It was lit on fire with Chilton in it.”

“We have a base of operations, though. He didn’t have an address, but they’re going to call when they can find the paperwork.” Jack sighed, a world-weary sort of sigh. It made Will feel like sighing, too. “He had to put one down on the original paperwork, but this place was old, Will. Zeller got a call to me first thing.”

“You get your base of operations, you find his stuff. Someone goes to get his stuff, you get Dolarhyde when he comes for Lecter.”

“Tell me how you see that panning out, Will,” said Jack. He sounded curious –good.

“We take him into federal custody; let Lounds ‘leak’ something about his hand in what happened to Dr. Chilton. Then we fake an escape.”

“An escape.” Clipped. Curt. Flat.

“A mail drop, a personal ad, something to reel Red Dragon in. Something to get him out in the open, something to get him near Lecter. Then, we kill him.”

“It couldn’t be fake, then, if we’ve got Lecter out and about, Will,” Jack protested. “If anyone was around him, Dolarhyde would know it in a second.”

“Anyone but…me,” Will said. The quiet after was so finite, he audibly heard Alana’s breath catch. Her leg pressed against his, not so much a nudge but a literal jerk of the knee.

“What are you saying?” she asked, and he applauded her steady voice.

“Let Louds leak that I’m his soulmate. I’ll take out the contacts, I’ll…let it leak,” he said. It tasted how sulfur smelled, saying it. He pressed palm to palm and stared down at his heel still grinding into the carpet. “The only person in the world Hannibal Lecter would believe meant this as well-intentioned would be me. Make it sound like I helped him escape, like we…run off together. Then it’s not only me, but Lecter too. I think Red Dragon wouldn’t be able to resist that. He’d want both our eyes, since they’re now connected.”

“No,” Alana said. “Absolutely not.”

“You think Lecter would go for this?” Jack asked, lifting a hand up when Alana started to protest again. His expression was thoughtful consideration, a glint of cunning in his eyes.

“I know he would. He’s thinking, ‘I’ve got this soulmate that I’m wrapping up around my finger. I got his girlfriend away from him, I’ve got him thinking I’m all that’s left now, and he’d do anything to be with me.’ If I said it to him, he’d do it. He’d think I was finding a way to break him out. He thinks I’m on the edge of a psychotic break because of him.”

“You’re not, though, are you? Are you in the saddle, Will?” Jack asked.

“I’m in the saddle,” he said lightly. “I’m actually sitting the right way for once.” A beat. “Hurts like hell, too,” he added, thinking of Molly and her fucking pauses.

“This morning, in the hotel room…” Alana ventured.

“Enough alcohol numbs some of the bond in extreme emotion. He felt my palpable pain at Molly-” He didn’t finish it. Pause. At Molly’s fucking pause. “Then he felt my intoxication, my fumbling about. Under the influence, it’s easy to manipulate emotions, let him think I was having a breakdown of the acutest kind.” Not a complete lie, but still a little bit of a lie. “He’s felt me drinking more and more, seen me visit more and more. I paid off an orderly to get in and speak with him, and I whispered against the glass, ‘trust me’. He will.”

Alana looked mildly pained at that, but Will didn’t give it too much consideration. He was looking to Jack, whose eyes turned inward, and a small, barely-there grin flickered across his lips. His laugh was a husk, but there all the same as he looked down to his desk.

“Katz has been on my ass about you drinking again, but this was all a set-up, wasn’t it?”

“When Molly was attacked, that was real,” said Will. He rubbed his palms on his knees to rid himself of the tacky feeling of her blood. “But everything else…it’s a long con, Jack. That’s what that’s called. Had to make all of you believe some of it. I saw in those files how much Lecter meant to Dolarhyde, and I think we can use it.”

“He’s your soulmate, Will,” Alana said curtly.

“And as a doctor of soulmate psychology, I can tell you by the books and by my own head what a terrible thing that is to be,” Will said pleasantly. “Lecter won’t let Dolarhyde kill him. We get Lecter to kill Dolarhyde, then I kill Lecter.” He rolled a thought around, considering it. “Or Dolarhyde kills Lecter, I kill Dolarhyde.”

“Absolutely not! Jack-”

“You been shooting?” Jack asked Will. He attentively ignored Alana.

“Every day since Hobbs,” he said gravely.

Jack nodded, and he settled deeper into his chair, thinking. They both ignored the indignant, horrified expression that Alana currently held, and as the seconds ticked with the thud of Will’s steady pulse in his neck, he watched Jack’s expression intently until he saw what he was looking for. Resignation. A hint of excitement. A tremor of disdain. A lingering touch of eager bloodlust.

“We keep a phone on you,” he said at last. “You have yours, then you have one where we track you at all times. I won’t let you go off on your own with him without some indication of where you’re going.”

“Jack, this is completely wrong, both ethically and-”

“-Something small so he won’t see,” Will said to Jack.

“-out of everyone here you know best of all just what that’s going to do when-”

“-If we can, we take the shots, not you,” Jack said. “You keep us in the loop.”

“-for the love of god, you two, you’re asking Will to commit soulmate murder!” Alana’s voice pitched, grew. She turned to Will and grasped his hand tightly. “You of all people, Will! You of all people should know just what it does to the psyche to take the life of someone you’re connected to!”

“…Of course I do, Alana,” he said, and he reached up to touch the scar just under his collar. “That’s why, out of anyone here, we know that I’d be the one to do it. No matter how connected, I can do what needs to be done.”

“You almost died last time,” she hissed. Her fear was as strong as her anger, and he cupped her hand in both of his, nodding. “I almost lost my friend, then, Will, and you’re

trying to take him away from me all over again?"

He thought of the lemon pledge and rubbing alcohol smell of the psychiatric hospital, covered thinly with French vanilla wall flowers. He thought of the rancid stench of rotting flowers in vases, how she'd come into the room with red cheeks and watery eyes. She'd punched her steering wheel, raged, then come into the room cool and collected. She helped put him back together again with scotch tape and the whispers of the caring. He sighed quietly and intertwined their fingers.

"The difference is, I know what to expect now. I can…prepare. I've been preparing. I'll have you, Jack, and everyone else to keep my head on right." A deep, pained exhale. "I don't think you understand just what it is to have Lecter so connected to me that I feel sometimes I can predict his words before he says them. Any other soulmate, I'd…learn to deal with it. This one…don't ask me to deal with it, Alana. I can't."

"You're putting yourself in a dangerous position to ultimately be worse off than you were three years ago," she said.

"You of all people know the price to pay," he said, and at that she went still. "You who connected to a Verger. The last of her family, too. Just what was the price of her love? Just what did she make you-"

"Alright," Alana said curtly, shaking her head. She pulled her hand from Will's and nodded, blinking rapidly to dispel tears in her eyes. "Alright."

"Alright," Jack said, and he folded his arms across his chest. "…Alright."

"Alright," Will echoed, and he ignored the thrumming whisper in his stomach that suggested that just a few hours away from them, sitting calmly on his bed, Lecter was also whispering, "Alright."

-

He took out his contacts. Thought about tossing them in the trash, but in the end he pocketed them for safe keeping, for the time that came *after*.

"Anti-Tristan law; the law protecting willful endangerment of soulmates," Alana had told him on the steps of the FBI.

"First degree murder," Will had replied pleasantly. "Rather, in your case…second degree? Harrison Act: preventing the protection of soulmates that allowed a soulmate to willfully endanger someone else."

"He fell into the eel tank," Alana defended, her voice sharpening.

"That's what went on police record, yeah," he agreed. "Who sleeps in his bedroom? After it was renovated, of course. Or did you two sleep in a different room? Couldn't quite bring yourself to live in the master bedroom?"

She let it drop at that, but the searing look she sent his way as she left him on the steps stayed with him long after. Fear made him rude.

Now it was the waiting game. He paced his room. Reread Dolarhyde's patient files. The more he read them, the more he pitied Dolarhyde. He'd gone into that office with a sincere, burning need to change, to become better. He was changing, now. He was Becoming. Something better, though, Will couldn't agree with. He cared about Dolarhyde. He wanted Red Dragon to die.

After what he did to Molly, he wanted to be the one to kill him.

When the time came for them to go and see Lecter, he let Jack do the talking. He stood towards the back of the small group, let Jack watch how easily Lecter needled under his skin. Two agents, two orderlies; Jack kept them at a distance, and for that Will was glad.

"Dr. Lecter, I'm Agent Crawford of the FBI," Jack said. Lecter turned from his usual place facing the wall, and his quick, mismatched eyes flicked over every face until he found Will's. His smile was lurid.

"Agent Crawford," he said lightly. Will would have called it coy, but Lecter was anything but. "Oh, yes…I remember you. You spoke against me during my trial."

"I did."

"Funny thing, trials. I can recall down to the eye color of every person in that room that spoke against me. How is your wife?" A pause as he tilted his head and studied Jack's face. "Ah…I do hope she sees a doctor, if she hasn't already. Your worry is…palpable."

"We're offering you a deal, Dr. Lecter. If you work with us in the capture of Francis Dolarhyde, we will see to it that you gain back all of the special privileges you enjoyed before your incident regarding Frederick Chilton."

"You said, in reference to me, 'the scenes of his basement were so horrendous that one of the men first on the scene turned in his badge a week later.'" A pause as he inhaled, nostrils flaring to take the scent. "How is he? Officer Stewart?"

"If you don't cooperate, then things simply go back to what they are now. A seat-less toilet, a bare, empty room." Jack didn't sound rattled, but Will saw it in the tense shape of his shoulders.

"This wasn't your idea," Hannibal said lightly. "Was it Dr. Graham's?"

A beat. "Yes," Jack admitted.

"I'd like to hear him say it, then. I'd like for him to say please."

Will walked around the orderlies and agents before Jack could snap, before he could say something irredeemable. He put a hand to Jack's side, skirted around him until he was toe-to-toe with the glass wall, eyes mismatched and beard scruffy. He'd let it grow out from Alana's keen attentions. Two days of waiting, but it'd been worth it. Had to keep up

appearances, had to look just a little hungover. His heart panged at the sight of Hannibal, so close but so far from him. He traced the curve of his cheek, the way the strands of hair fell across his forehead. Resented himself for the attentions.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Graham," Hannibal said kindly. "I see you're not wearing your colored contacts anymore. This suits you better."

In truth, being out in public like that again made him contemplate ripping out the maroon eye, but he'd held himself back. Alana wouldn't let him go through with this if he had a psychotic break in the middle of Kroger and stabbed his own eye out with a nearby 'As Seen on TV' whisk.

"…Lounds…Lounds found out," he managed quietly. "It's probably hitting the press soon. I thought I'd beat her to it."

"She is tenacious," Hannibal replied, sanguine-sweet.

He tilted his head the other way, and for a moment, despite the sounds of breathing and existing behind him, Will had the dizzying sensation of it being just the two of them, partitions up and the rest of the world locked away. If he reached out, would Hannibal reach back? No, no; there was an audience, no matter how it felt. No matter what his stupid, uncooperative chemicals said.

"You haven't been sleeping well, Will," Hannibal chastised quietly. "Did something happen with Molly?" A beat, this one purposeful. Knowing. "Did something happen with Matthew Brown?"

"I need your help, Dr. Lecter," Will said. "I'd like your cooperation in catching Francis Dolarhyde, if it's not too much trouble."

"There isn't much in the way of trouble for me these days, Dr. Graham." Hannibal said, a touch louder than before. "I don't even prepare my own meals, much to my consternation."

"In addition to helping, we may be able to work with the kitchen and give you something…a little more to your taste," Will said. Jack inhaled a snort behind him, and he resisted the urge to smile.

"Nothing of the human variety, though," Hannibal said gravely.

"No, nothing human."

"Do you find it humiliating that you need my help? Or are you resigned to this, so much so that it doesn't bother you that in the end, you came to *me*?" Hannibal wondered. "How many drinks did it take until you could muster the general courage to step before me and ask me to help a notorious killer catch a killer?"

"Am I the notorious killer in your speech, or are you?"

“You, of course, Dr. Graham. Garrett Jacob Hobbs was a fine kill. Ten bullets to the chest and shoulder.” Hannibal’s smile flashed sharp incisors and a subtly crooked front left tooth. “Of course, there is nothing quite so wonderful as using your bare hands. Intimate. Powerful.”

“…Please, Dr. Lecter.” It wasn’t lost on him how plaintive he sounded. Shame burned his ears red as he knew the people behind him most certainly heard, although they gave no word.

Hannibal smiled wider, a bright thing that took years off of his face. Will was dazzled by it, even as he cringed from it.

“I will gladly aid the fine brass of the Baltimore P.D. and the great, esteemed F.B.I. in catching you your killer, Dr. Graham. Really, if more people could be polite like you, I’d have eaten far less.”

Will cast a dark look to Jack and left maximum security with his hands stuffed into his pockets. He felt Lecter’s laughter along his skin like the teasing feel of a fine-toothed comb.

-

Beverly showed up at the hotel when he was finished with running Lecter out of his bloodstream for the night. He’d showered, hair damp and face only mildly scruffy, and he stared at her with his ugly eyes before allowing her in, taking the bottle of whiskey from her hand, a silent offering.

“Talisker isn’t cheap,” he said, closing the door.

“Neither is having to eat my own words,” she replied, “when Jack called a meeting and told us what was going on.”

So she knew. He didn’t so much as pour the whiskey as slosh it a little in the glass, setting it down so that he could still his shaking hands.

“Zeller having a field day?”

“He’s feeling dumb since all of his cracks about soulmates, and for once you were speaking from personal experience instead of textbook.” She sat down, watching him fumble with the neck of the bottle.

“He must be upset I didn’t get a discount on that bubble tea.”

“I know why you didn’t say anything.”

“That makes two of us.” He passed her a glass and sat down on the edge of the bed. She’d taken over his normal sleeping space, the chair with the faded, worn arms. When Red Dragon stretched across the bed, unfurling his wings, he had no choice but to curl up somewhere else to sleep, unless he wanted to be smothered.

“I also know how hard it must have been to try and keep quiet with all of that going on.”

“I’m not really the type for pep talks, Beverly,” he said, taking a sip. Light citrus with a smoky aftertaste. Smooth as the glint off of a psychopaths knife. Smooth as the mirrors in Mrs. Panter’s eyes.

“Not pep talking you. Making myself feel better for being blind.”

“To be fair, I wanted you to be blind,” said Will, turning the glass around in his hands. “I’m good at that.”

“You did connect to a psychopath,” she said, and they both laughed. He shifted on the edge of the bed to smack his glass against hers, and he tilted his head back to drink the rest in one go.

“How’s the new guy?” he asked.

“Still not my soulmate, but he’s Saul, and he’s a good guy. I think it’s changing from new guy to good guy.”

“That’s a good sign.” He stood and refilled the glass, rocking from heel to toe, then back again. He wondered if there’d ever be a time when Hannibal went from being New Connection to Old Connection –if New Connection could ever be Good Connection.

Not if he was going to kill him; that was for god damn sure.

“Dr. Bloom won’t leave Jack alone, you know. She keeps pestering him about what he’s going to make you do.”

“No one’s making me do anything. I made the plan.”

“…You know, even before you got tossed this shit stick, you understood better than anyone the struggles of being soulmates. How it’s not so pretty, not so clean. I was pissed when I found mine, and in the end it didn’t matter because I lost him.”

“You almost lost yourself,” Will corrected gravely.

“You know that their death almost kills the partner. That’s why they call it a severance in clinical papers rather than a death. Not only did they die, but they severed a part of you – enough that your own body thinks you’re dying.”

Will thought about the sound of screams, over and over and over again until they cut short. He wondered if Mr. Hess had terrified his fellow councilmen when he’d toppled over with those screams. The feeling of dying. The feeling of severance.

“I already feel severed, Beverly,” he admitted. “Disconnected from myself. I’m trying to keep him from bleeding into me.”

“I wouldn’t wish that kind of pain on you, Graham,” she said quietly. “I don’t know if I’d wish that kind of pain on anyone, that severance that feels like death.”

“On anyone?” he queried, and he gave her a long, searching look. “Do you really mean that?”

She opened her mouth to say that *of course* she meant anyone, but she stopped herself. They took turns sipping drinks, and somewhere in the hotel one of the SWAT team paced, happier apart from their soulmate than they ever were together.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for your love of this fic! I know I say that like...every chapter, but I honestly mean it. This last one was a doozy, wasn't it? I know some of y'all have been itching for Molly and Will to be put to some form of pause or stop, so here we are...to be honest, I feel for the girl. I've always loved Molly as a character, and I only hope I can continue each characters' arcs with what they deserve rather than just tossing them to the wayside when I'm 'done' with them.

A genuine, loving THANK YOU to the anon that commissioned a piece of artwork for the fic --you seriously have no idea how much that has made my day/week/month/year to get that message from an artist on Tumblr. It's just...ugh. I'm so thankful. I'm so excited!

Song Inspiration: 'House of the Rising Sun' by The Animals

One Eye Green, One Black With Grief

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 14:

Will wanted to see Chilton, but at the doors to the hospital, he couldn't. It wasn't so much the sight of his foul, awful skin or the smell of antiseptic laced with dead flesh; Will knew those things, expected those things. Perhaps it was the decidedly pungent absence of guilt when he thought of what he'd done, what he told himself he'd *inadvertently* done.

He hadn't been much of a liar before Lecter, but he was certainly one now.

Instead, he found himself at a small funeral service for Matthew Brown, huddled at the back of the group in a wrinkled suit with a tie whose knot was close to choking him. It'd been the coincidences of coincidences, if he was being honest. Pacing outside of the BSHCI, he overheard two orderlies getting off shift talking about it, deciding pointedly that no matter how much the guy hadn't deserved 'getting offed like that', they wouldn't go to the funeral of someone that'd conspired with Hannibal Lecter. He'd left his contacts at the hotel when he went.

Matthew didn't have much family –a mother, a younger brother, and a few acquaintances. Will had hoped his presence would go unnoticed, an unfamiliar face in a large crowd, but the size of the service was enough that he stuck out like a mismatched, unfamiliar thumb.

He didn't sit in on the actual funeral; he lingered outside and focused on the tactile feel of index finger meeting index finger, middle finger meeting middle finger, ring finger meeting ring finger, and so on until they were pressed against one another, like he could scrape his fingerprints off by sheer force. He rode the wave of his hangover with a grumpy awareness of his surroundings, the feeling of the dead too close to him for comfort. Organ notes wafted out of the church. Will wondered if Abel Gideon was out of solitary yet.

When it came time for the burial, that is when he was noticed, oddball that he was. The mother and brother cast looks, first curious then uncomfortable. The brother was the one confidant enough to approach him. He walked over the spongy grass and stared at the hideous concoction that was Will's tie.

"Did you know Matthew?" he asked. His voice wavered, but his back was rigid. The man of the house. The one to care for those left behind.

"Yes."

"Who are you?" he pressed –more of a demand than a question.

"Will Graham."

He didn't expect a reaction, but he got one. There was a shifting expression, one of surprise then dismay, and he grasped Will's forearm before he could think to draw away, his matching eyes fixated on his face. He had to have been no more than twenty or so.

"Are you? Are you, really?"

Will gently extracted himself from the boy's grasp, tugging at the knot of the tie. He really was horrible at them –clip-ons were the best in a pinch although Molly used to throw away any he bought.

"He said we'd never meet you, but you…come on, come on," the boy coaxed, and Will found himself standing up at the front, studying the gloss and sleekly elegant design of Matthew Brown's final resting place.

"Mom, this is Will Graham. It's *Will Graham*," the boy emphasized.

Her expression was polite disinterest, followed by a bleak shift as the cracks of her veneer revealed a distraught pain. She looked at him from head to toe, and he wondered if that is when the hit would land –he figured he'd allow her to slap him, if she wanted. Once, though. No more than once.

He stiffened when she threw her arms around him, hugged him tight like he could hold her cracks together. She looked to his face, eyes dry, and she reached up to touch him, much like a mother would. The way he thought maybe a mother would.

"I never thought I'd meet you," she whispered, and there was such genuine conviction that Will had to physically pull away from her, her love a waxy coating that made his skin feel dirty.

"I'm sorry," he said, and it wasn't right but it was all he had.

"He hoarded you away, much like he hoarded his life away," she said like he hadn't spoken, like he hadn't cringed out of her embrace. "Only a half-connection, but he said you bore it so well."

"What?"

"The relationship. You lost your soulmate, he found some part of his." At his stricken, stunned expression, her face softened. Polite disinterest became maternal instinct. "I'm sorry, this isn't…this isn't how we wanted to meet you. I'm Matthew's mother."

"I know," Will said slowly. Out of the peripheral of gazing at her chin, he saw one green eye, much like Matthew's had been, and one black as a jet stone in sunlight.

"This is Mark, but I'm sure you knew that. He said he'd showed you pictures, but he'd only ever showed us one picture of you. In profile, you looked so serious. I didn't recognize you."

Will's mind turned, reeled. He thought of distant interactions, uneven steps that didn't quite match with his, a shadow in the background that wasn't tangible, shifted unseen. He

was unseen because he'd wanted to be unseen.

That didn't mean he had to be that way with his family, though.

"I'm sorry," he said again, and he was Matthew's lover of three and a half years, a half-connection but one he bore so very well.

"I told him that place would just kill him one day," she said sadly. "He said you hated it, too, him being there."

"I did."

"Do you have family, Will? Are you…are you doing okay?"

Will swallowed heavily in the wake of her worries. He wondered if his own mother would have sounded so concerned if he'd died and Hannibal had shown up to the funeral, lurking at the back with a badly knotted tie. If Bill Graham would have been able to find her to even let her know Will had died. "I'm trying," he managed to gasp out.

He decided that Hannibal wouldn't have allowed himself to have a badly knotted tie. He'd have a freshly pressed suit, something plaid like the one he'd been wearing when he was arrested.

"He said you were a person of few words," Matthew's mother admitted. "I can see it, but I think it suited him just fine."

"Do you really catch killers? He said you caught killers," his brother, Mark, declared.

"I'm trying to." His throat was dry. He needed a drink.

"They have the one that got him, and that's what matters," she said. "I didn't understand what he was taken there for, what he was even arrested for…he wouldn't say. Did he tell you, Will?"

"…He wouldn't say," said Will. He tugged at the knot, took an uneven breath.

"He kept his secrets from you, too," she said disapprovingly. Will marveled at her eyes, no sign of tears along the rim of them.

"I'm sorry," he said again. He put his hands into his pockets so that he didn't wring them.

When she linked arms with him, hands stuffed into his pockets as they were, he didn't draw away from her. He let her have this, a memory of a relationship that'd never existed, a lie built upon the distinct lack of desire Matthew Brown had to look the fool in front of his family.

He promised to call, and he saw them to their car, accepting a kiss on his cheek from the mother and a handshake from Mark Brown, something firm and promising. When they drove away, he stood near the grave for a long time, staring down at it. Nearby, a fresh wreath

of flowers had been left for someone else. Not quite guilty, he snagged one of the roses off of the side of it and laid it over the fresh dirt.

He hoped that when the gravediggers returned to press the sod down, they'd crush the rose beneath it.

-

Zeller called while he was trying to unknot the stupid tie in his bathroom, and he answered with an irritable grunt, blunt fingernails picking at the satin.

"Jack's in a meeting, but I wanted to tell you we found the place. We've got a car coming to get you, and we'll take off in thirty."

Thirty minutes to be on a private jet to the lair of Red Dragon. Will stared at himself in the mirror, managed to rip the tie off of his neck, and he sighed in relief. He'd have enough time for a drink.

"Good."

-

He wore contacts because it was easier to concentrate without the feeling of people trying to sneak glances at his face. When they pulled up to the decrepit, peeling monstrosity at the end of a shabby lane, he looked up at it and rested his hands on his hips, frowning.

"Is the distance bad?" Beverly asked beside him.

Will cast her a withering glance. "It's been worse," he said, and that was that.

The house had a murmur of something secretive as Will let himself in with the key from the rental property, gloved hands squeaking on the metal of the knob. They hadn't wanted to give up a key, but with the court order they had to comply, and Will had been quick to help a secretary hang up from a whispered call she'd made while they walked into the office. It'd been to a friend to gossip, but Will wasn't going to risk that the friend was Dolarhyde.

"Joe Smith," he murmured. He went in alone, as he'd requested. The rest would come in later, when he'd had enough time to inhale the taste of Red Dragon. It had been a bit of a twist, trying to get the police to let them in without having already mucked the place up with their hands; they'd been nice enough to do a sweep and declare it uninhabited. Francis Dolarhyde no longer lived at the place.

Why have use of it now that he was on the hunt?

It still smelled like him, though. Joe Smith, a bad name. The nursing home had assumed he was Mormon with a name like that, and they'd left his personal life well enough alone as a result. A good cover, Will thought. A great cover.

Dust coated furniture, and he was able to see the places Red Dragon lurked. A recliner held no dust, although a small loveseat was coated in it. Will sat in the recliner, shifted and got comfortable. It was a place of peace, planning. The recliner was a throne. To the side, a small projector and a white sheet, and he picked up the first film canister, curious.

What did Red Dragon like to watch?

He hooked it up, fingers passing along the film as delicately as he was able, imagining his hands to be clever, quick. Red Dragon would have known how to unspool the film, set it up with ease to play. By the time Will figured it out, he found one of the things he didn't have in common with Red Dragon –he hated old film.

He turned it on and it clicked, whirred, ticked with each slide. The grainy footage shifted on the projector screen, and Will looked up, mouth turning to cotton at the image of Frederick Chilton glued to a chair, sweating from head to toe.

"I have had a great privilege…I have s-seen…I have seen with wonder…wonder… and awe…the Great…Red Dragon."

Will didn't like seeing him with no clothes, as vulnerable and bare as the day he'd been born. Will had made him that way, made him a target. Same way he made Matthew Brown a target.

"I have b-blasphemed against him…spouted lies from Dr. W-Will Graham. All said was l-lies, *lies*, but H-He is merciful. I will serve Him, and…in s-service, redeem myself. Will Graham…reach back, W-Will Graham…reach behind you, t-touch the…knobs…knobs of your pelvis…feel where the spine meets. T-That…is the precise…place…the Red Dragon will break…y-you."

There was a shadow of movement, and Will watched with wide eyes, rising from the recliner as a Great Red Dragon shifted into view. It took several seconds for Will to see it as a magnificent, lovely tattoo rather than a real, breathing animal. The way he curled, shifted in stance made the spine of the dragon curl, *breathe*. The face cut to the side, dipped down; Will dipped with it, took a step forward and had to stop himself from lunging as Red Dragon lunged and grasped Chilton's mouth with his teeth, bit down.

A howling shout of pain, the sound of wheels jerking against hardwood floors –*these* hardwood floors, Will realized dazedly. He took a step back, then another. Red Dragon roared, Chilton screamed, and Will could only stare, half horror and half amazement at the sight of Chilton without lips, blood pouring down his face and over his teeth, rivers of red against the stark white. He screamed, and screamed, and screamed, and Will clapped his hands over his head, keening with it as he fell to his knees.

The projector clicked off; Will pressed his forehead to the aged, ugly rug and breathed. He grasped his head rather that reach back to touch the space where Red Dragon had mentioned, the space where he was supposed to break him. He painstakingly refused.

"Fuck you," he seethed into the carpet. "Fuck you."

It took a long time for him to get up, to explore the rest of the house. He forced himself to though because he had to get to *know* how Red Dragon lived if he was going to make Hannibal kill him. It was only right. It was only respectful. Red Dragon probably knew the Hess' and the Panters' intimately before their death, so it made sense that he returned in kind.

-

When he walked out of the house, he gave a nod to the rest of them to go in and loitered by the car. He agitatedly tugged at the gloves, removed them and stuffed them into his pocket. Fingers danced across the keypad of his phone, and he called Jack.

"He's not there, I know," Jack said.

"We interrupted him," Will replied. He bit the fat of his cheek, imagined the sensation of flesh breaking against enamel. He imagined what Chilton's skin tasted like. Bad, now that it was burnt.

"What?"

"He was going to send us a video of Chilton, but we interrupted him."

"Lounds' article was released, so he probably knows now."

"Everyone knows now," Will said. He rubbed his bad eye, covered as it was.

"Where's your head?"

"He's filmed the killings, Jack. We know he worked at a film place before, and he filmed his killings. They'll all be in there. This is Red Dragon's lair."

"Okay, but where's your head?" An uncertain, wavering hesitance. "Did you watch them?"

"It's a good plan still," Will assured him. He began to pace.

"We can assume he's-" At Will's sudden laughter, Jack paused. "What the hell's so funny?"

"You remember in Quantico, that kid that said 'we can assume'?" Will asked. "You got in his face, shoved his hand at the chalkboard and made him write A-S-S-U-M-E over and over and over again."

"…I remember."

"You grabbed the chalk from him, shoved it at his face and said, 'WHEN YOU ASSUME, YOU MAKE AN ASS OUT OF U AND ME.'" Will pantomimed underlining the letters, grinning a little.

"He was being an ass," Jack said flatly.

“I’m being an ass,” Will replied congenially. “Assume all you want, but he’s going to come for the bait.”

“How’d you know he was interrupted?”

“He made Chilton sing a speech about just where Dolarhyde was going to snap my spine. He wouldn’t have done that unless he was going to send it for me to see. He has no idea we’re here, otherwise he’d have burnt it up to hide evidence before he left.”

Silence. Jack didn’t find it as funny as Will did. Realistically, Will only found it funny because he knew Red Dragon did.

His guts twisted, panged. Hannibal was concerned for him. Hannibal hurt while he was away. Will thought to brush fingers along his skin to see if it’d blister and burn the way it felt like it would, but he didn’t. The woman on the plane was right –first was the worst. It got easier, but only just.

-

He lay in bed the next day and stared at the ceiling, Dolarhyde’s file laid out alongside Mrs. Hess’ and Mrs. Panter’s. After a final meeting with Jack discussing for the *umpteenth* time the general plan, he had some free time. That time was spent seeing the Red Dragon curl and lash out on camera over and over and over again.

He replayed Chilton’s screams over and over and over again.

He didn’t like how he’d moved when Red Dragon moved, shifted and almost sprung. Much like a marionette he didn’t think to question when the strings were pulled. It’d made sense at the time, but as he held up a photo of *Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun*, he stared at the great wings and imagined them placed over Dolarhyde’s shoulders, majestic. Lethal.

He was getting to know him very well, Will decided. A little too well.

The madness of his mind was spilling into the cracks of Will’s. He felt it, acknowledged the sensation of near-disassociation. He both was Will Graham and not Will Graham in the silence of the hotel room, both Red Dragon and not Red Dragon. Rather than fight it, he took a sip of the rather expensive whiskey Beverly had given as a show of apology and reveled in the feeling of what it’d been to rip Chilton’s mouth off with his teeth.

Now that he was back in Baltimore, the burning feeling had abated. He wondered if Lecter would want to see him like this, eyes dazed, too glassy. Lips chapped with constant biting, fingernails wrecked from gnawing at them in thought. He considered taking a walk, but he knew that if he looked at people while like this, he’d see people not as people but as something else –*the stone I’d use to carve Michael,* he thought. He’d see them as tools, beautiful tools to his Becoming.

Dolarhyde was Red Dragon; just what exactly was Will Graham? In that moment, periodically lifting up pictures of Mrs. Hess and Mrs. Panter, he couldn’t say.

-

Molly woke him in the early morning, early enough that he was still drunk from the night before. He fumbled with the phone, fought with it, then lifted it to his ear rather than sit up and let the room spin.

"Hello?"

"Will?"

"Molly," he realized, and his voice was equal parts awed and horrified. The sensation of her pause was stifling, and he had to sit up so that he could better breathe. Beside him, Red Dragon watched. The room spun wildly.

"You sound drunk, Will," she said.

"I am drunk."

"From last night, or is it from this morning?"

He wasn't sure why she'd care, and he thought about saying that. Why care, Molly? A pause meant an end, no matter how many others wanted to suppose there was hope in the fact it wasn't quite an absolute yet. He knew Molly though, and he knew many people like Molly; a pause was so that the doubts could crowd their mind until they suffocated whatever hope was left in salvaging the relationship –if there'd been any to begin with.

"Last night," he managed from a mouth that felt fat and distinctly inarticulate. "You woke me up."

"I'm sorry," she said, and the words sounded odd coming from her end of the phone.

"Don't say those words." He took a long, pained breath, closing his eyes to stop the room from spinning. "You…you don't have to say those words to me."

She didn't speak, and he listened to the silence of her breathing as he held the phone against his shoulder with his ear and managed to make his way to the bathroom. He had to wash his hands of the feeling of Red Dragon slithering through his bed, through his skin. He dried them with the scratchy towel by the sink and glanced up to the mirror, blanching at the mismatched, surly gaze staring back.

"How bad is the drinking?" she asked.

"It's fine."

"Will-"

"We're paused, so I don't have to feel bad about lying to you," he said. He still felt bad, but he was just drunk enough that words were going to fall out every which way without his ability to care. He wondered how inebriation felt through the bond; did Hannibal feel

drunk, or did he merely feel disconnected? Will certainly felt disconnected, disjointed. His body was not his own.

His eyes weren't his own.

"You do feel bad, though," she said. "I can tell."

"I do," he agreed.

"My parents say hello," she redirected when he said nothing more.

"Hello."

"…I saw the news article, Will."

He nodded, the true motives behind her phone call finally revealed.

"Everyone's seen the news article."

Not everyone. Matthew Brown's mother and brother didn't seem to read Tattler News, and he loved them a little bit for that. When they did finally find articles about Matthew, maybe they'd only see the part where he aided a psychopath, not the part where the psychopath was connected to Matthew's faux-lover? If he had it in him to hope, he'd have hoped ardently that they simply let Matthew Brown go to rest, so that their memories of him wouldn't be tainted with his lies, with his deceit. They wouldn't love him the same if they realized he'd lied about his relationship, if the person he claimed was his boyfriend was in actuality involved with the woman he'd helped to almost murder.

No one can love the same when that love becomes tainted with something unrecognizable, something they never knew to be wary of. They may continue to love, but as Molly had fast found out, it is not a love that can sustain. It is not a love that can grow.

"How did she find out?"

"The way Freddie always finds out," Will said sagely. That wasn't true; Freddie normally found out through not entirely legal means, and this time they'd given it to her hook, line, and sinker.

Will refused to pose for photos, this time.

"Oh, Will," she sighed quietly, and it burned in a way he couldn't handle. He continued to stare at his gaunt features in the mirror, focusing on the way his pupils dilated whenever he paid particular attention to the maroon eye rather than the blue.

"Oh, Molly," he returned with only the mildest hints of sarcasm.

"How are you feeling? I just…you're alone in that hotel room, aren't you? This is happening with Lounds all over again, except this time you're alone."

“No I’m not,” he whispered, pressing the phone to his ear. “Don’t worry about me, Molly. This is why you paused us, isn’t it? I’m not alone; I’ve got Hannibal-fucking-Lecter.”

It was meant to sound harsh, but it was bleak. It was meant to needle at her, really punch it to her that she’d shifted aside and paused him to let a psychopath in, but as he stared at that eye, he couldn’t make his voice aggressive. He could only sound pained, agonized. The room swayed, and he swayed with it, catching himself. He felt like he was falling underwater again.

She wanted to ask about it. He could taste her burning need to know. “How…does he make you feel?”

“I’m staring in the mirror, and I don’t know who I am anymore,” he confessed. He thought of Matthew Brown, whose life was cut short because he’d been cruel when he could have been kind. He thought of Chilton enduring acute agony because he’d been cruel when he could have been dismissive. “I don’t recognize my own face. These…these aren’t my *eyes*, Molly. How do I feel? How the fuck do you think I feel, being a soulmate to someone like *that*?”

“Will-”

“I said this would change me, and I told everyone; I told you, I told Jack, I told Alana, I told…everyone.” He stared at his eyes, at the shadows underneath. He told Jack that being connected to Hannibal made him feel like he’d pressed black paint to his eyes. He wondered what Molly would say if he said it to her instead.

“You told me,” Molly agreed. “You…tried to warn me, and I pushed you anyway.”

“I’m not drinking a lot,” he tried to reassure her. “Just a little.”

She was quiet at that, and she let him have his lies. When they were paused, he could lie to her all that he liked, it seemed. He figured, finally dragging himself out of the bathroom, it said more about him than it did about her, that the simple difference of wording –paused rather than together, a break rather than a whole –made him feel somewhat less guilty about lying so abrasively and badly.

He blamed it on the alcohol, since she’d woken him up while he was still very much under its thrall. When he woke up again later, he knew to just blame himself instead, like any other honest alcoholic would.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all of your feedback/support! We've got about 6 chapters left after this guy, and I just want to say that you have all been so amazing and wonderful! :)

Someone mentioned being surprised about Hannibal not breaking out, and I'll agree that I honestly looked at a few forks in the road for possibilities in this plot as I was trying to outline it --I think my next piece in my one-shot fics 'Art For Art's Sake' will actually be an au where Hannibal does actually break out rather than wait :) Stay tuned!

I'm currently in the middle of making a playlist to put on tumblr for this guy, since I do song inspirations for most chapters. Stay tuned! :)

Song Inspiration: 'Way Down We Go' by Kaleo

One Eye Green, One Veiled Sea Blue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 15:

Matthew Brown lived at an apartment complex towards the outskirts of the city with decently thick walls, kudzu creeping up the side, and a door whose lock was picked with relative ease.

As Will stepped into the apartment and lingered on the landing, he supposed he could have asked for a key, maybe explained the situation to someone who would take pity and just let him in. He was tired of having to explain himself, though. He was tired of completely understanding and recognizing the absolute expression of dismay, followed by pity. If there was one thing he'd choke on in the end, it was the pity that people gave him, now that they knew about his fucking eyes.

What have you done to your eyes, Will?

Matthew's apartment was clean, mildly Spartan in furnishings with a distinct organization that showed his living alone rather than with a roommate to save on money. It was a one bedroom apartment with a plain blue bedspread, one bathroom with a plain blue curtain, and one photo in the living room of a man in profile showing one blue eye.

He stared at that photo of himself for a long time. It was one that Alana had tagged him in on Facebook, something teasing and reminiscent of their college days when all seemed to be somewhat manageable. He looked younger in it, the lines and weariness not so set into his face. It was a stoic photo, like Matthew's mother said, but it was the sort of photo that made him look handsome rather than fatigued –purposeful, as Red Dragon called him.

He sat on the sofa next to the end table that housed the picture, and he tried to sink into the space that Matthew Brown lived in, the space that he existed without having to hide himself. He'd not even been able to be honest with his family, his co-workers, or his friends. He'd pretended at a relationship with his family, sneered at Lecter's connection to Will with his co-workers, bemoaned singledom with his friends.

There was nothing inside of the apartment that felt truly like Matthew at first. He shifted on the sofa the way he imagined Matthew would, lingered in the kitchen whose refrigerator held no magnets boasting announcements of weddings, reminders of bills, or lists for groceries. Inside of the fridge, a small bowl of leftovers contained an egg salad, condiments were minimal, and the milk had expired. Will poured the milk down the sink so that later in the week, Mrs. Brown didn't have to when she came to collect her son's things.

The books in the one bookcase in the house held discussions on psychiatry, notes on soulmates. It was there that he felt he'd found some of Matthew Brown, confused and bitter as he highlighted the portion discussing half-connections and how they ultimately were like

having no connection at all, both socially and neurologically. Will stood frozen by the shelves of books on anatomy, books on animals, books on zoology. There was even one of Will Graham's own books –something he hadn't intended to have published, but Alana had coerced him into it after a publicist made contact –discussing the ramifications of the social indoctrination of soulmates within education and upbringing. There were notes throughout it, written in a cramped hand in the margins:

Exposure to normalized 'need' of soulmates at young age leads to expectations later in life socially?

Friend groups determined in high school based on if you have soulmate or not – Graham ostracized for not having soulmate? Maybe bitter?

Lots of derision here. –This in reference to soulmates whose sentences in prison were lighter due to having a living soulmate that stood before a judge and begged to not be kept apart.

Bad experiences with soulmates at young age? –This one written beside the case study Will had used to explain serious cases of bullying for those that had already found their soulmate in elementary school by other children that were unable to articulate their own jealousy or worry they wouldn't find one.

Statistic of colored contact purchases to hide soulmate or to pretend to have soulmate –NO clear stats (Green 0394 for mine)

Graham visited with Dr. Bloom again. Shook my hand, but he didn't look at my eyes. – This was written beside a paragraph discussing the rarest form of soulmate pairing: the staggered connection. Sometimes, one person connected early on, and their eye changed color. It was a half-connection that had no effect on the second person until months later – years, even –when they met eyes again and a full connection was established. Will had gone on to discuss events could have occurred between the initial eye change that caused the other person to suddenly connect, and there were several sentences underlined, highlighted, near-smudged with fingers that gripped the pages tightly.

The spine of the book was bent, much loved and worn from being read over and over and over again. The deepest indent in the spine though was the space that opened up to the discussion of the staggered connection. Will tasted his desperation there.

He sat down beside the bookcase where he imagined Matthew would have sat, and he traced over the letters written along the margins. He could feel the hope in the words, the idea that maybe if Will had managed to look *again*, something would have happened in their time apart that he would finally connect back. It was in those vulnerable spaces that he finally found Matthew Brown, quietly yearning that if he just waited long enough, Will would see him for what he was –what they could *be*.

I thought, what if he saw someone like me?

He laid his head against the edge of the bookcase, book open on his lap. He was cruel when he could have been kind. He couldn't take his anger out on Hannibal at the time,

therefore he took his anger out on the catalyst, the one that dipped along the shadows and let the ball roll that inevitably led to Molly and her god damn pause.

The one that spent the quietest parts of his days wondering if one day Will would see him and finally *see*.

There was a thin notebook beside a biology book, and he slid the other book back into place, sitting down once more and propping himself up against the wall. It was a sketch book, and he opened it, his gut tight. Sketch books were intimate; writing was intimate. He was seeing too much, knowing too much, but for what he'd done to Matthew, he felt it was right that someone in the end knew him and knew him well. For the sake of the mother that hugged him beside the casket and thanked him for what he'd done, he owed it to Matthew to finally see.

He saw himself in those pages. He hated himself a little bit more.

They were sketches done from a mildly unpracticed hand, but a hand none-the-less. Among small doodles of animals copied from the zoology book up above, Will saw himself through the eyes of Matthew.

His estimation of Will Graham was far kinder than Will Graham's.

He looked pensive, purposeful. In one he smiled, glancing off to the side, and Will recalled his meeting with a man that that had a speech disorder where he could only speak when Will looked away.

In many, he looked like there was a glow about him, something more than flesh and bone and color. There were earnest expressions, resigned expressions. Page after page gave Will the understanding of just how someone saw him when they hardly knew him. With each intimate line and curve of graphite, there was a longing and a comfort. Three and a half years of sketches, small notes that tracked Will's accomplishments with pride.

March 14th, moved and began work at a small office specializing in soulmate grief

May 21st, awarded certificate for best lecture on soulmate grief, quantified by the ratings and reviews of attendees.

August 3rd, positive review for work posted in the journal

October 12th, appearance in court that aided in release of a soulmate wrongfully imprisoned –cornerstone of case his analysis

October 20th, dating someone? How long?

February 14th, her name's Molly, and they're <u>not</u> soulmates.

After confirming that Will and Molly weren't soulmates, he went back to his sketches and his notes of things Will had done, things that were public knowledge and easily accessible. Alana must have mentioned something around Matthew about Will and Molly for

him to have known. He traced over the pressure of the word ‘not’ for a long time, the sensation of relief at Matthew realizing that Will may not have connected to him, but at least he hadn’t connected to anyone else, either.

He was jolted from his pained musings by the sound of the door opening, and he stood up quickly, tucking the notebook under his arm like it was his. A man he didn’t recognize stood in the doorway, and he looked appropriately confused.

“Who the fuck are you?” the man demanded. Will noted the keys in hand, the nametag at his belt.

He thought to maybe placate the man, maybe explain himself. The words were jarring in his throat, though. Instead, he gestured towards the photo of himself on the end table, like it should explain everything.

People are impressionable; when silence spread and gaps exist, they make explanations, create stories to placate themselves. People have a need to know, but when little information is revealed, they make the information. This was no different. Will saw his eyes leap from Will to the photo, then back to Will. Thoughts tumbled, shifted, and before Will’s very eyes he saw the man create a world within himself, a world where Will was a soulmate that’d just endured the wrenching loss of losing his other half.

“Oh, you…you were Matt’s…” His voice trailed off, and he nodded. “You look…hell, sorry. I’d just never seen you around. I’m his landlord –well, I’m the landlord’s son.”

“Nice to meet you,” Will managed. “I’m leaving, if that’s alright.”

“Yeah, shit, man…yeah.”

Will passed by him, and there was that fucking look again –pity. He despised the pity. He paused in the doorway, notebook tucked underhand, and he glanced back.

“His mother’s coming to get his things later this week,” he said.

“You don’t…you don’t want them?”

“No.”

Will left him with that silence as well, let the man make his excuses as to why he wouldn’t want his soulmate’s remaining things. Driving back to the hotel, Will supposed that it only made sense that if he’d just lost the most important thing in his world, the last thing he’d want is to have to remember it.

-

The woman he sat down across from was aged, both from time and from a life of secrets. She eyed him across the table, and he eyed her back, fingers tapping idly on a file.

“You’re the biological mother of Francis Dolarhyde, Marian Vogt,” he said at last. She had mismatched eyes and the sort of hair that screamed the wife of a politician.

“I didn’t keep contact with him,” she said curtly. Age had given her fine lines around the eyes from posed smiles and harsh glares.

“You had an orphanage take him soon after birth where he was taken in by his grandmother, your mother, at about five years of age,” Will said, ignoring the shrill, shrewd stare she held. Behind the mismatched gaze, there was something decidedly guilty. “Later, though, you took him back once more after having three more children with your soulmate when he was aged nine.”

“You’re telling me things I know, Dr. Graham,” she said, shifting in her chair. Her discontent was as tangible as the itch of Kevlar under his shirt. “Is there something wrong? He died a few years after he married that *woman*.” Her sneer told him exactly what she thought about Reba’s skin color. The derision was an itch he couldn’t reach, and he frowned.

“As a soulmate psychiatrist, my specialty is in the studies of the psyches of children whose minds are still developing within a culture of soulmates like ours. He once saw a psychiatrist that was working with him on his grievances regarding soulmates, and we’ve attempted to analyze his mental state for our work.”

“What do you think I can give you that a shrink can’t?”

“He didn’t speak of his childhood very much. Only a month or so after you took care of him once again, you had him taken back to the orphanage under ‘unknown’ circumstances.” He’d been watching her face, and when he emphasized ‘unknown’, an odd sort of spasm twitched near her right eye.

“It’s been so long that I can scarce recall,” she sniffed delicately. “He burned their house down, you know.”

“I think you can recall,” Will replied.

“I really can’t.”

They considered one another from across the small desk, a spare office he’d borrowed from a local counselor’s business Dr. Avery had contacted for him. While Will’s face was grave passiveness, hers was defensive, a stark expression of a shuttered window with no way to peer behind the curtains.

“I think he killed an animal,” Will said at last.

“Is this how you speak to your clients?” Marian demanded.

“You’re not a client,” Will replied. “I think he killed the family pet, and you sent him away for it.”

The horror, unmasked at the ease in which he revealed a sordid family secret, was palpable. Will wondered if he reached out, he could touch it with his bare fingertips, wrestle it into something substantial so that he could *understand* Red Dragon through the mother that’d abandoned him *twice*.

“That little shit wasn’t normal,” she said at last. “And my husband –my *soulmate* – just got sicker than sick after he was there, lost the election, lost face with the community because of that…that…boy.”

“The three children you had with Howard Vogt were well aware that they were the product of a soulmate union and that Francis Dolarhyde was not,” said Will, ignoring the way her hands clenched a small handkerchief in her lap. It was reminiscent of old southern women in church, trying to wrangle themselves together when they heard something particularly spiritual or troublesome. “Just how did that line manifest in your home?”

“I don’t have to deal with this. You know, you people call me, make it seem like this is something important –he’s not even *alive* and everyone is trying to make me take responsibility for something that isn’t mine…” She stood up to leave, fumbling with her purse as she strode towards the door, cardigan slipping off of her shoulder with the weight of the purse swinging wildly.

“Mrs. Vogt, were you aware that he was being abused?”

She paused at the door, turned to consider Will with a furious, horrified expression.

“Excuse me?”

“He didn’t speak of his past with his psychiatrist, but he did speak of his dreams. Nightmares of scissors held against his genitalia, threats of emasculation, brothers that weren’t brothers slamming his face to a mirror repetitively after a lost election. Were you aware of these things occurring in your home? Or did you simply not care because he was the product of something that wasn’t your soulmate, therefore his existence was inconsequential to you?”

Will hated doing small speeches like that, words tumbling and falling like rocks that crashed every which way. He’d hit his mark, though; the longer he spoke, the angrier she became, the more embarrassed she became as she hissed, stalked closer and leaned over the chair she’d once sat in, fuming.

“He took my beautiful daughter’s cat and strung it up,” she snapped, “and he had a face not even a mother could love. My mother held his life over my head like some sort of trump card because I didn’t want him, but in the end he was just like her and they burned their homes around themselves until there was nothing left. Neither one of them had soulmates for a reason, Dr. Graham. I’m the only one in my family that did, and what’s that say about them?”

“I think that says more about you than it does about them, Mrs. Vogt,” Will replied calmly, “that you would turn one child away for not being the product of a simple chemical reaction in the brain.”

“Fuck you and don’t ever call me again,” she snapped, and she stormed out of the office, slamming the door behind her.

Will sat in the aftermath of her guilty fury, and he felt that he understood Francis Dolarhyde a little bit more, the things he was searching for behind the mirrors in Mrs. Hess' and Mrs. Panter's eyes.

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He got a call much later, as he sat in his hotel room and turned the bottle of whiskey around in his hands. It was almost gone, a testament to his commitment of numbness and his commitment to drinking himself into oblivion when he didn't have to fire on all pistons. He was only guilty at Beverly having wasted so much money on the bottle when he'd partaken of it with a gluttonous need that well drinks could have provided for less.

It wasn't Molly's phone, nor was it the landline to her family's house. Will decided to answer, head propped to the side to hold up the phone as he poured himself another glass.

"Hello?"

"Working late, Dr. Graham?"

"Good evening, Hannibal," Will said wearily. He wasn't sure whether or not to be surprised; he'd stayed well enough away after Hannibal agreed to help them, unable to fathom staring at that space between them with no way to really close the distance. It infuriated him. The fact that it infuriated him disgusted him.

"You don't sound as though it is a good evening. In fact, I'd say you're three glasses into a rather potent form of whiskey."

"Do you feel drunk when I'm drunk?" Will wondered.

"You once informed me that emotions are only felt in extreme moments. For the time of our connection, I've come to the conclusion that either *you* are only able to feel things in extremities, or the distance has heightened my ability to feel your emotions due to your refusal to come close to me for the time being." Hannibal paused to allow Will a miserable laugh. "However, when you drink it is a muted thing. The longer that time passes, the more I find there to be far more frequent bouts of muted emotions."

"They call that alcoholism," Will informed him.

"Does Molly know that you have fallen off of the wagon, dear Will?"

Her name in Hannibal's mouth was wrong, all wrong. Will studied the lovely color in the glass, reflected every which way by the lamp next to his favored chair, and he sighed dismally.

"Molly paused us," he confessed. "And it's not because of the alcoholism."

"My dear, are you trying to inform me that it's because of *me*?"

"She wasn't pausing us before you came along, that's for damn sure."

Hannibal was quiet, and Will wondered what sort of secrets he kept, what sort of thoughts he was latching onto without sharing. He sipped the whiskey, savored the feeling of numbness that it provided. The after burn was much like how his skin felt whenever he was too far away from Hannibal, and that sort of torment was something he was more than happy to deal with.

"I've been informed that I'm to be moved tomorrow," Hannibal said when Will didn't elaborate on Molly's ill-fated pause.

"You're finally getting what you wanted."

"What is it that you think I want?" Hannibal asked. "To be closer to you? To have reason to be moved near you?"

Will snorted. "Nothing so romantic. You wanted a way out of that institution, and I've provided it."

"An implication that the benefit of being close to you is somehow sub-par to the idea of being let out of this infernal place. Rest assured, Dr. Graham, I am also looking forward to being exposed to you without this wall between us once more."

"Touch starved?" Will taunted. The moment he said it, he wished that he hadn't. It sounded almost flirtatious, something he'd say to someone he wanted to touch. A wicked, dark part of his mind whispered, *don't you, though? Don't you want to touch?*

"As much as you are, I think," Hannibal replied dryly. "Although with the alcohol you've supplied yourself with, it's difficult to tell. Was that your intention?"

"Why did you call, Hannibal?" Will asked, exasperated.

"You can hide many things through your use of self-medication, but you can't hide your pain at your dear Molly pausing you," Hannibal said. "In your mind, everything you've done now seems almost inconsequential, that you can't return to her and say that all is well."

"I don't want to talk about that," Will snapped.

"She'd have paused you whether or not you connected to me, dear Will," Hannibal assured him. "In the end, I was not the one that brought the darkness out of you. I merely showed you mine in return."

Will finished off the whiskey with a vengeance, slamming the glass down with a little too much force. He thought about pacing, about throwing a few more things, about cursing the shadow of Red Dragon lurking nearby, but ultimately he slumped down farther in his chair and swallowed heavily, the room hot and blurring around him like the landscape was melting at his very feet.

"You don't have to remind me," he whispered, aggrieved. "I am well aware what sort of person I am, Hannibal. The kind of person that I will always be."

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Will didn't have to see Hannibal get strapped into something much resembling a dolly that packed large boxes for delivery men, nor did he have to see him get wrapped into a straightjacket. He sat outside of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane the next day in the early morning and enjoyed a small cup of coffee that didn't come from the BAU break room. The last time he'd shared a cup with Beverly, he'd had to ruminate on the taste of two-day-old, reused beans. She hadn't been sorry in the least when he'd pointed it out.

Beside him, a soulmate argued on the phone with someone, head dipped down. Their whispers were harsh, prickling things.

"I know she's in prison, mother, but –oh my *god*, did you really just say that? Really? She's mentally unwell, you can't just. No. No. Yes, god, I know, but…"

Her voice trailed off, and she cast a side-eye to Will who pointedly tried to ignore her.

"Look. I know you think this is just stupid, you and dad aren't soulmates, but you have no idea what it's like. I can't…just stay away. I can't just…" A pause as she scrambled for words to convince her mother of her dubious choices. "I could walk up to anyone with a soulmate, and they'd tell you the same. You can try to stay away, but sooner or later it pulls you back. She's always kind to me, mom, and we were dating long before she ever killed those people."

Will brushed his thumb over his lips to rub away a small, secretive smile.

"You know what? I don't care what Pastor Mark says, how can you call it a sin if God made us soulmates? Because it's a girl? Would you care if I'd connected to a boy that killed people instead? That's so homophobic!"

The voice on the other end grew louder, but Will couldn't quite make out the words.

"Oh my god! Okay! Fine! God!" She hung up and threw her phone into her purse, righteous indignation. Will sipped his coffee. He could taste her pain as much as he could taste her longing. It didn't mix well with the coffee.

"Do you have a soulmate in there?" she asked glumly.

"Yes."

"Worker or inmate?"

Will glanced at his watch; Freddie's article had been out for a few days now. "Inmate," he said.

"How long?"

"Not too long."

"My mom…she says it's not worth it. But you know, right? You know it's worth it?" She was desperate. She saw his mismatched eyes and needed reassurance from someone that

knew.

Will watched the army of vehicles roll up, four police cars and a transport van. He finished his coffee, tossed the cup in the trash can beside him and stood up, rolling his neck back and forth to pop it. He sniffed his collar; it smelled of expensive whiskey and a long night of no sleep.

"I don't know yet," he said honestly. He glanced at her green eyes that were just different enough to be a problem within her family dynamic. "If I see you around later, I'll be sure to tell you."

She watched him climb into the back of the transport truck. She watched them drive away.

Hannibal watched him from the cage he'd been locked into, arms tied tight around his torso, a mask strapped across the bottom of his face to keep his mouth from snapping. There was a part of Will that despised it, longed to rip it off of him, but another part whispered that he'd bit a nurse's tongue off, once. His heart rate hardly changed at it.

His heart rate changed when he'd hurt Will, though. That thought closely followed, and Will sneered at it.

"Back in Baltimore for the time being," Hannibal noted lightly.

"I'd been in Maine," Will informed him. The need to reassure him that he hadn't been trying to run from him was as off-putting as the tie had been at Matthew Brown's funeral.

"What did you find in Maine, Dr. Graham?"

"Francis Dolarhyde's base of operation," he replied. The agent shot him a glance at giving away such information, but at the sight of his mismatched eye, they looked to Lecter's and couldn't suppress a shudder. Whatever they thought was kept silent, but Will could all but taste the discomfort, closely followed by the pity. He resented the pity.

"I'm sure that was enlightening," said Hannibal gleefully.

Will hmm'd an assent and shifted around the agent to sit down.

"Comfortable?" Hannibal asked him as he settled down on the metal bench. On one side, the orderly sat prepared to administer a sedative if Hannibal became belligerent. On the other side of him, the agent wielded a shotgun.

"…Going to be," he said. "You?"

"This is more fun than I've had in the last three years," he replied, and Will saw through the small holes made for breathing, the twitches of a smile. "I owe it to you, dear Will."

"Happy to oblige," he muttered sarcastically.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for just being the way you are! You guys are the best, and I hope you know how much I appreciate you! :)

It looks like this will be about 20 chapters, so we are getting to that cusp of the story. This has been such a wild ride to write!

If you're looking for more works by me in the meantime, I did just start another multi-chapter one that can tide you over called 'The Unquiet Grave', and we're looking at the end chapters of 'Dread and Hunger' as well as 'Magnum Opus'.

Song Inspiration: 'Do You Feel It' by Chaos Chaos

Two Brown Eyes That Hunt

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 16:

The ride was long, and despite the whispers of adrenaline that curled along his wrists and made his fingers dance and twitch along his leg, Will found himself dozing in and out of a dreamless state, head leaned back against the siding of the transport vehicle. The road hummed beneath his feet, and the calm, easy breathing of Lecter across from him was almost hypnotic. With the turning of the road and the silence of his companions, his head bounced and lolled before he'd catch himself and blink blearily around. Whenever he came to, he'd catch Hannibal's eyes across from him, and he'd swallow heavily. Hannibal didn't sleep. He kept his gaze fixated on Will, an intent and probing stare that made the hair on the nape of his neck stand on end. He was risking a whole hell of a lot on his confidence in his own self-control.

His eyes saw better without contacts. He noted the fine dips in the skin just under Lecter's eyes, the way his cheeks pressed against the mouth restraint whenever he exhaled too hard. Will wondered what it'd taste like to trace his tongue over it. He wondered if Molly was watching the news, if the Lounds article sat at her elbow so that she could read it over and over and over again, obsessing now that she knew who he'd connected to. *Oh, Will*, she'd sigh. Oh Will. Oh-fucking-Will.

"You look to be in pain, Dr. Graham," Hannibal observed. "Are you in need of an aspirin?"

"I'm fine," he said. Molly paused them. Oh-fucking-well.

Silence once more. Will dozed, eyes roving behind his lids lazily.

The sound of a police car's sirens brought him to once more, and he blinked sleep from his eyes, looking about. Beside him, the orderly's mismatched eyes narrowed, and the agent with two matching eyes gripped their shotgun.

"What's going on?" he asked. The sound crested them, whizzed by them, then maintained its wail at a short distance.

The orderly grabbed the walkie-talkie and lifted it to his mouth. One brown, the other hazel. "What's going-"

They didn't hear the gunshot, suppressed as it was, but they heard the scream of rubber tires on asphalt as the police car ahead of them went careening. The agent beside him shifted, Will looked to Lecter in time to see a small, secretive smile, then he was thrown into the cage across from him as the transport vehicle crashed into the car ahead of them.

He'd been in a few wrecks in his lifetime, although nothing like this. Dazed was a good descriptor –confused. Adrenaline made his heart drum in his ear like the beating wings of a great bird. He held onto the openings of the cage in front of him, and he gritted his teeth against the jarring, spinning, slamming. Metal screamed, and he was thrown to the side, slamming into the orderly and slumping into the small space on the floorboards around their legs.

There he lay.

Breathing was about as good as it could get, and he allowed himself to do just that. He wheezed, listened to the sounds of the agent on the walkie-talkie, asking something that sounded an awful lot like *what the fuck is going on*. Pain blossomed along his temple, and he focused on minimizing it, on testing out just how the rest of him was doing. Legs could move, check. Arms could move, check. Shoulder ached, check. Light sliced through his vision, then the visage of a man. Tall. Broad. Capable. A glint of silver, bam, *bam*. Bodies dropped. Will fumbled. His body was not one of them. It was dropped, but not for long. Not for good.

When he managed to get up, the spray of blood along his pantleg was what first stood out to him, followed by the bit of skull sliding down the wall where the orderly's head once rested. He swallowed, tasted bile, swallowed again. Tasted blood. The orderly's mismatched eyes gazed ahead unseeing, and he wondered just where their partner was when they'd feel the crippling sensation of their lover dying. How they'd scream and scream and scream and scream. Their body would think they were dying. They'd think they were dying. Those thoughts tied to another, then another. Hannibal. You have to go find Hannibal.

Will scrambled out of the back of the van, noting Lecter's lack of presence, noting the straightjacket that lay dangling from the tailgate like a misshapen white flag of truce.

Outside, it was far worse. He inhaled it, caught the moan of horror before it could escape him. He looked to the police vehicles scattered across the road like dominos, the blood mushrooming along windows, small sprays like waves from red oceans. No Hannibal.

You have to find Hannibal.

He didn't quite register the police car pulling up in front of him until it stopped, until Hannibal opened the passenger door for him and pushed a body out. It rolled to the pavement with a wet thump, a limp flop. A small cut and a split lip was all that showed for his own damage in the wreck, and when he met Will's dazed, unfocused gaze, he grinned ever-so-slightly.

"Going my way?" he asked –dare Will call it flirtatious?

Will swallowed convulsively, pressed his lips tightly together, and nodded. He climbed into the car, unable to help the blood that smeared across the back of his pant leg or the bit of it that made his palm slick as he pulled the door closed. As Hannibal pulled away, he considered it studiously, the color far bolder against his skin than he'd imagined. His heart hummed at the sight of Hannibal being alright, at being so close to him. He'd found him. Hannibal was okay.

“I’ve been thinking, dear Will, and I’d almost say you take things far too seriously. Coupled with your empathy disorder, I believe that’s why you’ve taken up drinking again,” Hannibal said in the quiet of the car. The road hummed to life beneath them as he peeled away from the carnage, both hands on the wheel. Will numbly looked up from the blood and tried to swallow again. His tongue stuck against the roof of his mouth, bone dry.

“I’m going into shock,” he informed him casually. His ears were ringing. His skin was cold.

“You are,” Hannibal agreed. He reached over and took Will’s hand, and to Will’s utter surprise he placed it towards the inside of his thigh. Will started to protest, but Hannibal shook his head and tutted lightly. “Just feel for my pulse there –the femoral artery. Hold onto that and time the beats. Time is not our ally yet, and I won’t stop the car for something as easily treatable as shock.”

Will obediently focused on the pulse, ignoring the fact that it was very much towards an intimate part of his leg.

“Physical contact calms soulmates,” Will managed to inform him. Useless facts at a time like this, but that was all he had.

“Yes, I know. Coupled with focusing on a steady pulse, it should do just the trick.”

Will hummed low under his breath, nodding. “Releases serotonin,” he tacked on lamely. His fingertips felt cold to the touch, and he pressed the bloodstained ones to his cheek to test it. Yes, very cold. Ten dead bodies sort of cold, a Red Dragon that very much knew their general location sort of cold.

“Do you have your phone still?” Hannibal asked.

Will nodded.

“Jack Crawford will surely track us on it.” A beat as he cast Will a wan glance. “Unless your intention was for him to track us on it.”

“…I wiped the phone,” Will managed after he could catch his breath. He unrolled the window with the hand still covered in the police officer’s blood, and he tossed it out of the window, letting it fly out into the field beside them where it disappeared into the brush. No amount of ‘gorilla shatter-resistant glass’ would save that from being destroyed –not at their speed. He thought about rolling the window up again, but the wind was cool on his face, and it helped alleviate the rank, bitter smell of copper pennies permeating the small space of the front seat where two men had just been murdered.

“Clever boy,” Hannibal praised. “Was this your surprise to me all along?”

Another nod. Will gripped his thigh tighter. The femoral artery pulsed against his palm. His blood sang –*soulmate, soulmate, soulmate*.

“You didn’t just plan this far, though. What was your next step? Regale me.”

“What am I doing,” Will murmured. He thought of Molly. He thought of pauses, and the way Lecter had looked at people while he was being led away in the courtroom, a life sentence for his crimes. Butterflies pinned to a display board, and he’d *let him out*.

“That is the shock talking, Will,” Hannibal chided. “Come now, focus. What was your next step?”

“Um…new car.” A slow, approving nod. “A new car, new clothes, new…place. Hotel. I have cash.”

“So that they can’t trace your debit card, yes,” Hannibal agreed. “Rather than a hotel, though, I think I have something in mind that would better suit the both of us.”

“I’m not letting you murder someone to take their house,” Will warned him, and rather than become defensive, Hannibal let out a soft, amused huff of laughter.

“That would be a terrible waste and a rather easy way for us to be found. I know you’re in shock, but *think*, Dr. Graham.”

Will didn’t want to think. If he stopped long enough to think, he’d have to marinate on the thoughts that he’d been the reason Red Dragon had killed those ten people. Because of his actions, his body count was rising. First Molly, then Matthew Brown, then Chilton; now ten more. His hands were almost as bloody as Hannibal’s.

“You have a safe house?”

“I just need to make a call to the right person. It’s not far from here –three hours at best.”

Three hours. Will could do three hours. He pressed his sweaty back to the seat, sunk deep into it, and he kept his grip firmly placed on Hannibal’s thigh, counting the beats in disjointed time with the lazy blinking of his mismatched eyes.

-

He woke when they stopped, long enough for Lecter to find them a new car and a pay phone that was still in use. Will lent him quarters from his pocket, and he waited in the old, tired passenger seat of an oldsmobile with a WWJD sticker on the fender. Whoever Hannibal was speaking with, it didn’t take long for him to convey what he wanted. He hung up, wiped the phone down with a rag he’d found in the police car, and returned to their new car, firing it up.

“Chiyoh is having it prepared for us. We should be there in approximately two hours.”

“The FBI never knew of this place?”

“No.” Hannibal flashed him a brief slice of white teeth, driving out of the parking garage and out onto the street. “It isn’t in my name.”

Will fiddled with the glove compartment, and he retrieved napkins from it with a stab of relief. A half-empty cup of something smelling like watered down lemonade rested in the cup holder beside him, and he dabbed the napkins in it, using it to wipe the blood from his hands, his fingertips. He noted Hannibal watching the action out of the corner of his eye, but if he minded much, he said nothing. Once they were clean enough to only show small streaks of orange rather than putrid red, he tossed the used napkins into the cup and pressed the lid on it with a muted *snap*.

"You're not in shock anymore," Hannibal noted. Once they were on the interstate, he reached over and took Will's hand, guiding it back to his leg. Rather than press it to the inside of his thigh where the feel of his pulse lay, he merely sat it on top, palm spread across Will's twitching fingers. The contact made his heart thud erratically. Endorphins, he reminded himself. *Endorphins*.

"This is for you, then," Will accused.

"It's to bring you out of your head, since you're inclined to internalize."

"Oh, do I?" he scoffed.

"You let our connection remain a secret until you felt there was no other alternative. Your Molly only learned the truth after she saw for herself. You lied about drinking again until she found out due to a lapse of memory on your part. You surmised there were ten dead bodies, and you're more than likely taking responsibility for placing them there."

Will wanted to disagree, but he couldn't. Lecter seeing that far into his mind, knowing exactly where his tasteless thoughts would go, made his skin crawl as much as it was a comfort to know someone else could see and not sound so god damn afraid in seeing.

"Okay," he said. "…Okay."

Lecter hmm'd under his breath. "Do you imagine how you'd have killed them, given the chance?"

"I think about how I'd have saved them."

"If you were fast enough to realize just what was going to happen?"

"If I hadn't let my selfishness get in the way of justice," Will murmured. He swallowed the heavy lump in his throat, tapped his tacky fingers on the stained leg of his pants. He preferred them that way, sticky from lemonade rather than blood.

"You chose me over ten lives," Hannibal murmured. "I take back what I said before, Will; you are a romantic."

It was jarring to hear those sorts of words from him. A burn, but something sweet, like taking a sip of hot chocolate too soon after being made. As much as he cringed from the thought that yes, yes he'd let ten people die to get Hannibal out of custody, the feeling of his

hand on Will's, his thumb brushing absentmindedly along the back of it seemed to distort the fact of the matter, soften it.

"Would you have stayed in that prison cell forever if I didn't find a way to free you?" he asked. He despised just how agonized his voice sounded.

Hannibal's lip twitched, but if he meant to smile he kept it tamped down at the tone of Will's voice. "You know I'd have found my way to you if you left me, dear Will. No matter where you run off to, I'd have found you."

"I shouldn't have compromised myself, then."

"On the contrary, this is by far the best for us." For us. Like they were an item. Like they were together.

"You wanted me to be the one to do it," said Will, his palm pressing down against Hannibal's leg. "You waited for me to come to you."

Hannibal hmm'd lightly, a soft assent. "I'm a patient man. I'd waited years for something to happen in that institution. I didn't mind waiting for you."

"No, you wanted it to be *me* to choose to do this, that way you could hold it over me that in the end, I came to *you* and freed you rather than you escape to hunt me down. You waited for me to choose so that you could win. You got me. You beat me." He chewed on his bottom lip violently, almost spit at the taste of blood on his skin; he'd bitten it in the crash.

"My dear, dear Will," Hannibal admonished gently. His grip on Will's fingers tightened. "Even now, you are so keen to see me as the monster inside of your head. Is it so wrong of me to be pleased that the person I wanted finally chose to desire me in return? Of course I waited for you to choose; our actions made sweeter when done with two willing hearts as opposed to only one."

It sounded romantic, him saying that. It sounded like he was the kind of person to care about things like consent and partnership; Will knew better, though. It was all a game, and he was playing it just as eagerly as Hannibal was, step for step, breath for breath. Dear, dear Will. Oh, Will. Oh paused, darling Will.

"I'm tired," he said at last, bleakly.

"Sleep, then. I'll wake you when we get there."

Only Molly had once commanded his ability to rest or not with such coaxing tones. Instead of Molly, now it was Hannibal Lecter, and he let the lazy tingles slide along his skin from each stroke of Hannibal's fingertips on the back of his hand, relishing yet abhorring the simplistic nature of everything seeming to be so utterly, fucking *right*.

-

He woke to the taste of the ocean, salt heavy on his tongue. His cheek was pressed against the window, and his ear had been crushed the wrong way in his sleep. He sat up

dazedly and yawned, fist pressed to his mouth, blinking at the late afternoon sun dipping along the scattering of trees.

It was the lack of motion that'd woken him, as well as the sound of the driver's door closing. Will detangled himself from the seatbelt and climbed out of the car, looking around what seemed to be an architect's dream, a summer home with angled, sharp windows reaching up to a dagger-like point that struck out at the sky. They were parked on a smooth, paved driveway that wound into the nest of trees that curled in towards the road, and if he didn't know better he'd have said he'd climbed out of reality and into a dream. Just at the maw of the road, he imagined Red Dragon watching, waiting. He stared long enough until he could convince himself that it wasn't real –just his imagination.

"Chiyoh said she was going to get groceries," Hannibal said, heading towards the house. His off-white jumpsuit was stark and startling against the picturesque display, and Will found himself following, ears keen on the crash of the ocean a short distance away. The ocean; father, boats, diesel motors that stained hands worn from toils of hard labor with oil and grease. Waves; Molly, pausings, water cresting just overhead until he's facing a glass barrier where Hannibal Lecter used to be. He shook his head at the associations, the bleakness of them. When the front door opened, he hurried in, foot catching on the frame.

The inside was just as elegant, just as refined. Rich, dark walls gave way to open spaces with enough windows to allow the elements to be the design rather than an over-abundance of interior decoration. His shoes squeaked on the hard floors, and he followed the straight set of Hannibal's shoulders towards a living room where he stopped to look about, pleased.

"She's kept it in good order," he said lightly.

"Who is Chiyoh?" Will asked. His voice was rough, stones crushing against stones from sleep. He paused just a breath from Hannibal, and that close he could smell the generic detergent of his jumpsuit, the sharp tang of sweat and blood. He inhaled deeply, eyes fluttering closed.

"My cousin," Hannibal replied.

"You have a cousin?" He opened his eyes, puzzled. The fact didn't set straight.

"Many people have cousins," he said, and he turned to Will, a mere whisper taller than him. That close, Will had to crane his head back slightly to meet his gaze. One eye blue, the other maroon.

"I don't have cousins," Will managed. His skin burned with the thought that this was the first time he'd been chest to chest to Hannibal Lecter with no bars between them. A treacherous voice whispered, *now would be a good time to touch*.

"Are you afraid of me, Will?" Lecter asked. There was something dangerously appealing about the way his lips curled around the words. Taunting. Will's fingers twitched with the urge to reach up and touch his face, the urge to reach up and strangle him.

“No.”

“You’re alone in a secluded place with a killer,” he reminded him.

“So are you.”

“Are you here to kill me?” Hannibal’s head dipped down, his lips ghosting the space just before touching.

“I don’t know,” he replied, surprised at his own honesty. “Right now, I’d just like to touch you, if that’s all the same.”

“To touch is to consume,” Hannibal murmured. “I’d much rather consume you in such a manner pleasing to both of us.”

“Is that supposed to be romantic?”

“Merely reassuring you, dear Will.” He tilted his head the other way, regarded Will with something akin to mischief and a deadly sort of ravenous delight. “Merely reassuring you.”

Will couldn’t say who moved first; his hands went to Hannibal’s neck, and Hannibal’s leg swept Will’s feet out from under him, sending them both toppling to the floor as he took Hannibal with him. Will landed on his side, hard, and he rolled with it, legs going around Hannibal’s waist in order to flip them so that he was on top of him, a sharp grunt rushing from his mouth. Hannibal wouldn’t be pinned so easily, though; as Will’s arms wrapped tight around him, his elbows bowed out to better push him away, to better keep Will from getting to his neck because *he needed to get to his neck*.

Hannibal’s arm swung up, and his palm slammed into Will’s shoulder, aching from the wreck, making him hiss in pain and relax his grip just enough that Hannibal rolled them, pinning him down to wrench the knife from Will’s hand that he’d grabbed from his pocket as they tumbled. It clattered off to the side somewhere, and Will drew a leg close to his chest, sending Hannibal up and off of him with a snarl. Hannibal flew back, caught himself on a small stand where a pot fell and shattered to the floor, and Will scrambled to his feet.

They circled one another, considered one another.

Will lunged, struck Hannibal with a jab to the throat that sent him to his knees, gasping. As he fell, though, his hand flew out and grasped Will by his belt loop, sending him toppling to the floor where they both fought to grab at one another. Will’s head hit the ground hard, and Hannibal found his way on top of him, hands going to his throat. Will’s blood sang, his heart roaring in his neck as he clapped his hands to Hannibal’s ears, disorienting him enough to twist around him.

They struggled, writhing with spastic jerks as they rolled across the floor. Hannibal head-butted him, and Will almost let go, dazed as his skull pounded. He responded in kind, stars bursting his eyes, worth it to hear Hannibal grunt in pain. They continued to roll, jerking and thrashing around one another until they slammed into the wall, and Will triumphantly

found himself on top, hands grasping Hannibal's wrists and pinning them overhead as he breathed raggedly, thigh pressed taut between his legs to keep him from bucking up and throwing him off. Poised over him as he was, Hannibal squirming beneath him, Will went to grasp his neck to squeeze, to choke. He had him. He *fucking* had him, and he could finally fucking *murder* him.

He froze, though. Be it the look on Hannibal's face, the way his pulse pounded in his neck, but the bastard looked almost *excited*. Will's grip loosened on his wrists, and maybe that was enough to still Hannibal's resistance –it took far too long to realize that it wasn't so much resistance as it was moving *against* Will, thighs pressed tight against Will's leg as he used his weight to keep Hannibal's hips in place.

They stared at one another, breaths coarse in the otherwise silence of the room. Will gripped wrists one-handed, a distant whisper telling him that Hannibal wasn't trying to free them anymore, and he reached for his throat, fingers twitching, hand shaking. He didn't grip it, though; his touch glided along the column of his neck, paused at the space where it dipped in then up to his jaw. He looked from the spot he was suddenly hyper-aware of, met Hannibal's gaze in the fading light of the sunset. One eye blue, the other maroon. They looked familiar to him, as familiar as his own skin, as familiar as the faded scar on his knuckles from when he was a child. His skull throbbed, his muscles ached, but all that he could feel was the steady heartbeat just beneath him.

He released his wrists; hands went to Hannibal's face, and Hannibal's went to his hips, his grip a scalding burn that both pained and excited him. Lips clashed against one another, bruising in their force as teeth nipped at the skin, just hard enough to hurt. Will's hands went from his jaw to Hannibal's hair, gripping tightly, tugging.

He was on fire, and god if it didn't feel *right*.

Hannibal bit his bottom lip hard, tugged. Will gasped, and his tongue was in his mouth, exploring, dominating. They rolled, Hannibal pressing down on top of him, chest pressed to chest, and Will's hands went down his neck to his back where his fingers dug in, needing. Wanting. If he hadn't gnawed his nails down in his darkest moments, thinking, he'd have drawn blood.

Hannibal's hands roamed, taking pleasure in the way Will's skin warmed under their touch over hips, ribs, chest. One hooked around his neck where his palm pressed to the frantic pulse, and he broke the kiss in order to dip his head and press biting, teasing kisses to the tender skin there, pausing at the artery and grinning against it. It pounded against his mouth, daring him to bite.

"I can feel your pleasure as much as I can feel my own," he said. "Is that normal for soulmates, Dr. Graham?"

"Shut up," Will ground out. His hands slid down to Hannibal's hips where he pulled them sharp against his own, the friction blessedly wonderful. His soft moan made Hannibal's breath hitch. "Just shut up."

Hannibal thankfully shut up. The other things he did with his mouth were far more pleasurable.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all of your support and love for this! Things are heating up, yes?? :)

Song Inspiration: 'If I had a Heart' by Fever Ray

One Eye of Love, One of War

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 17:

It was the blood that stopped him. The blood, and the way it'd seeped through the denim to stick to his leg and taint it with the ugly discoloration. He was pressed against the doorway to the bedroom, gasping for air that refused to come, and as Hannibal worked the jeans off of his hips, he looked down and saw the blood.

"No," he murmured, and it seemed to shock the desire out of him, a cold douse of water to his system. He shook his head, like it could dispel the image. It didn't. Streaks of blood, faded but still present. A cop, dead by his hand. No, no, Red Dragon's –weren't they the same, though? Didn't Will exist in this form because Red Dragon existed? Weren't they, in some odd sort of way, two parts of a convoluted whole?

He wanted to meet Red Dragon. He was sure they had a lot in common.

Hannibal glanced at his face, then to the streaks that continued down to the top of his calf. He passed a hand along the skin, but the blood was long since dry and didn't wipe off so easily.

"No?"

"No," Will said, and Hannibal nodded. Perhaps it was something bleak in the way Will stared down at himself, trembling with desire, underwear tented with just how hungry he was. Perhaps it was the way Hannibal was so in tune, so completely part of Will now that he'd tasted him that he could feel the coil of disgust, of self-loathing that was fast replacing his *want*.

Either way, he helped Will out of his jeans. Instead of taking him to the large bed, he took him to the adjoining bathroom. Will's feet were cold against the tile, and he shuddered in his flannel shirt that clung to his back, from sweat and what he now remembered as the blood that'd coated the seat in the cop car. He'd pressed himself to it in his exhaustion. It clung to him now, accusing.

He stared at the ridiculously glorious tub, and the cubicle shower beside it burst to life under Hannibal's adjustments, the room quickly filling with steam as he adjusted the water temperature. He turned back to Will, jumpsuit halfway down to reveal a white t-shirt underneath, and he padded over, fingers going to the buttons on his shirt.

"No," Will said, mournful. Hannibal hmm'd low under his breath in agreement and nodded.

"Let's get you cleaned up, shall we?"

Will thought to say no again, but under his touch he was clay. He nodded mutely, and when he stood naked before him, he didn't find himself feeling exposed or vulgar. It was action, reaction, a disconnect between the part of him that yearned and the part of him that thought of the ease in which Hannibal had tossed the body from the car. Will's hands passed at the hem of Hannibal's shirt, lifted it over his head and helped him undress in turn.

He led Will into the shower, and he stood him just under the waterfall of water, fingers tousling his hair for it to better soak up the delicious heat that hit his skin and soothed him. His body hummed at the contact, approving. Hannibal reached for the shampoo, but when Will tried to take it from him, he tsk'd and shook his head.

"Allow me," he said, and he turned Will so that he could tilt his head back and wash his hair, fingers digging into his scalp lightly, soothingly. He sighed under his touch, leaned back against him where his chest was broad and his skin was warm.

"Are you so very far into your own head, Will?" he asked as he rinsed his hair. "Where nothing but the monsters play?"

"I think I'd have used the suppressor, too," he said at last, as Hannibal grabbed soap and a washcloth.

"Homemade by the looks of it."

"But I think…to just leave them like that, in piles every which way, was tasteless."

"He wanted to set a crime scene where there was no doubt we were not the culprits, but it could certainly look that way to the untrained eye. Jack Crawford will know exactly what happened there." He slid the washcloth along his back, working at removing the stains of just what'd happened only hours before. Will nodded mutely.

"I've been trying to see the world through his red haze…hear the cold drips of kerosene in his darkness," Will said. There was something vastly intimate about sharing that with someone, especially someone like Hannibal. Like whispering secrets to the devil, lips pressed too close to his ear.

"I'd imagine it's difficult, now that you've experienced your own darkness." Hannibal passed the washcloth along his neck, paused at the scar tissue. "This is the first since Garrett Jacob Hobbs. It would no doubt be harder to imagine him killing now that you have the taste for it yourself."

Unjudging. A distinct lack of morbid glee at his struggles. Will nodded, a quick jerk of his head.

"To kill is to entertain the most intimate of moments with someone as their life flees. You shared that moment with someone else, though, didn't you?" Hannibal asked.

"His daughter."

"She bore witness to your own becoming."

“It was just an interview,” he said bleakly. “I was curious, so I wanted to talk to him.”

A smooth, steady pass across his chest. He stared down at the soapsuds and watched the water beat them away as quickly as they’d risen –marveled at the understanding.

“You knew, though. In the back of your mind, you knew it was him, and you merely needed something more substantial for Jack Crawford to bring him in.”

“He knew. I got there, and he’d already killed his wife. Had his daughter in the back room when he sat down with me, and…something. Something in his eyes, something…in his smile. I spent so long trying to know him, see him past the slides, the grainy pictures of the dead, the tender way he returned the one whose meat was wrong…we’d do the same thing, same time of day. Different location. We moved in sync, it felt, and I looked at him, and I knew that he knew.”

“What did he do?”

“He lunged across the table, grabbed me. We fought, struggled…he had me by the neck. Dragged me in the other room where his daughter was curled up, crying by her mom. Screams sat on the air, fat. His knife got my gut, and I just…bled everywhere. Fell to the ground, trying to hold my stomach in. I told her, ‘it’s going to be okay.’”

“Did you keep your promise, Will?” Hannibal asked. “Was everything okay?” Will turned to him, studied his jawline and the way water droplets pearled then fell. He nodded, glancing to Hannibal’s shoulder where a long healed bullet wound lay.

“He got the knife in her neck by the time I got the safety off, but I got him. Took ten shots to get him down, then I just…held her neck until paramedics got there.” A laugh, unamused. “They said I tilted her head just right. If I hadn’t, she’d have died, bled out.”

Hannibal’s fingers danced along the Glasgow smile across his abdomen, his mark of ‘heroism’. Will put his thumb to the long healed circle at Hannibal’s shoulder and pressed lightly.

“You had him for so long though, the sudden sensation of his death must have undone you far more than your own potential demise,” Hannibal noted.

“They didn’t know it, but I had encephalitis.” A pause. “*I* didn’t know it. Made me…see things. I thought I was him. I thought that I hadn’t gotten him,” Will confessed. “My brain was on fire, and every time I looked in the mirror, I thought it was him. So I got rid of him to make sure Abigail would be okay.”

“And is she quite okay?”

“She’s in college now…one more semester and she’s done.” He smiled, bleak. “She e-mails me to tell me about her studies in criminology, sends Christmas gifts. Birthday gifts. Thanks me a lot. She avoids eyes, too. Her dad claimed he was her soulmate –one sided connection.”

“She owes you her life. You almost lost your own in more ways than one, and I’m sure she realizes that each breath she takes is borrowed because of you.” Hannibal’s hand passed over the scar tissue once more, and he dipped his head in to drag his tongue along the line Will had made with his own two hands and a mind on fire. Will’s breath caught; he nodded.

“No matter what, though, I’m still the guy that murdered her father. I won’t forget that.”

“You couldn’t. So you left, made a new life for yourself once you pried him from your veins; tell me, is the Great Red Dragon so deep inside of you that you’re going to try and carve him from your skin, should you live through this?”

Will thought about lying, but he couldn’t. He was too worn out to, too stunned by his capacity to endanger everyone around him for the sake of his own selfish desires. “I don’t know. Sometimes, I see him sitting beside me, mirroring me. Dust motes coalescing, suspended in the air to almost take the shape of his face. I think he and I are a lot alike.”

“When Red Dragon comes, Will, I want you to deal the killing strike,” Hannibal said kindly. “You have already become so dear with him, it’d be selfish of me to take that moment from you. Don’t use a gun this time, however; when the time comes, you should find a way to make it more intimate than lead and fire.”

They stayed in the shower until the water temperature cooled just enough to be mildly uncomfortable. Hannibal turned it off, left Will dripping on the bathmat, and returned with a robe and a thick, plush towel. After, he led him towards the bed and guided him onto it, hand hot against his hip, lips cool against the juncture of his jaw to his ear.

“I’m relieved to finally have washed away that stench of hotel aftershave,” he whispered to him. Will couldn’t help but smile.

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Hannibal’s clothes were about a size too big, but Will managed. His belt cinched the slacks, and he tried to find the least expensive looking button-up in the closet. After he cleaned the blood from his shoes, he deemed those good enough for reuse, and he stood in front of the bathroom mirror, scowling at himself. From the underwear to the socks to the soap he smacked of something that was not himself, but he reasoned that he hadn’t exactly packed a bag. It’d have been suspicious to pack a bag.

He felt Hannibal through four walls away, and it was as much a comfort as a sign of too much touching. He was drunk off of it, the knowledge of knowing exactly where he was at all times, like he could reach out and find him, even blind and at a distance. He’d woken with his face pressed into his neck, like he could somehow inhale the very essence of him.

He didn’t like acknowledging that it was the best sleep he’d had in months.

He fingered the small phone Jack had given him to hide in his wallet. It was smaller than his debit car, as flat as four cards put together. He considered telling Hannibal about it.

Considered against it. Jack needed to know where they were for when the time came –came for what, Will wasn't sure anymore.

Will tried to reason it was an overload of chemical reactions in his mind at being so close to his soulmate, but that wasn't pleasant to think of. Why make science of what just felt so fucking right? It wasn't chemicals that made Hannibal understand his mind with Hobbs. It wasn't chemicals that made him understand where he went when he saw the blood of someone else plastered to his skin.

He went into the kitchen of smooth, marbled counters and chrome appliances, and he hovered near the door, watching. Fingers tapped on the doorframe, and he studied everything with quick, sweeping glances.

"Good morning," Hannibal said pleasantly. The way he moved among the bags of groceries was vaguely reminiscent of how he moved while behind bars. There was a little more freedom of gesture, a little less animal in the curve of his step. Even now though, there was still something predatory in his motions, a sleekness in how he turned his shoulders. Will didn't think time would ever leach that out of him. Wasn't sure if he wanted it to.

Maybe he just didn't look cornered anymore, an animal one breath away from a defensive bite.

"Chiyoh brought food?"

"She already left, unfortunately. She is mildly reclusive in nature, and she doesn't tend to desire being involved in any of my antics unless completely necessary. I told her to go and enjoy herself."

Will watched him among a spread of wildly bright fruits, and he moved closer to inspect what smelled like gourmet coffee. At what had to be a hungered, wild look in his eyes, Hannibal poured him a glass and stirred sugar into it, offering it to him silently.

"…Thanks."

"There is an art gallery nearby, and I wanted to see it. Would you care to join me?" he asked, turning to his array of fruits. Will sat down on a stool to watch him chop, slice, and create. A quiet pang in his stomach reminded him of Molly's Pinterest recipes he'd never get to try. Not after this.

Definitely not after this. *Oh, Will.*

"We're supposed to be on the run," he said, sipping the coffee.

"Even when I was 'on the run' I still stopped to enjoy the beautiful things. There is no reason we can't now."

"When were you on the run? You were arrested right after Alana turned you in."

"In Florence, mostly. They called me 'Il Monstro' there," he mused, and he paused to glance up at Will with a devilish, knowing smile.

"…Is that what your drawings are? Florence?" He hated that he remembered. When Hannibal circled him to find something in the pantry, his fingertips grazed his back. An unconscious gesture, but it lingered in a pleasant way –made him think of ripples in a pool of water.

"Mostly Florence, although there are places from France, other parts of Italy, Spain; I traveled to many places in Europe, each more beautiful than the last. Florence was mine, though," he said, returning with something vaguely resembling an ugly root. "Florence was mine."

"Is that where you'd go after this?"

"Would you go with me?" Hannibal wondered. He looked up from the knife that he used to carve kiwi into stars, and he surveyed Will, the light from the windows illuminating the blue of his eye.

"I don't know what to do after this," Will admitted. "I just…"

"Couldn't stand the thought of our separation for one more moment," Hannibal finished for him. His flash of a smile was all canines. "I really was pleasantly surprised –it was a wonderful gift."

"I told Jack that I was going to kill you after you killed Dolarhyde," he said, and he took a gulp of the hot coffee to have something else to do with his hands and mouth rather than reveal too much.

"I assumed as much."

"That's how I got him to agree." A beat. "Alana said it was the worst idea she'd ever heard."

Hannibal hmm'd, as though he could imagine just how well *that* conversation had gone.

"She told me I'd regret it if I did."

"At the school the two of you attended, and many others much like it, there was a distinct lack of personality among the student body in the psychology department. Alana was one of those that stood out from that rabble." He mulled a memory over, eyes glazing as he thought back to something. "During my trial, you sat beside her the entire time," he said, setting the kiwi aside to focus on the mangos. "She seemed far more upset than a person who'd discovered their teacher's interests delved into a socially unsavory side."

"You asked her to be blind, and she wasn't," Will replied. "She respected you, cared about you, and you were the Chesapeake Ripper. She couldn't reconcile the two, and she couldn't understand why you didn't kill her when you could have."

"You understand, though," Hannibal said, glancing up at him. His head tilted, a saccharine smile on his face at the *knowing* of the depth of Will's understanding.

“She was smart. It would be a waste of a mind, let alone a mind you’d helped mold. You thought maybe you could twist your way out of it, but they made it to your basement before you made it to Alana to convince her not to say a word.”

“I asked her to be blind, and instead she was brave,” said Hannibal, and there was an odd expression on his face, like he wasn’t sure whether to be proud or infuriated at the thought.

“Don’t hurt her just because you’re free,” Will warned.

“I did promise her I would, though,” he replied amiably. “I always keep my promises, Will.”

“It’d…” he fumbled, chewing his words around in his mouth. The thought of Alana dead by his hand through proxy made his intestines clench like he was being stabbed all over again. Then it’d be Matthew Brown, Frederick Chilton, Alana Bloom, eight cops, an FBI agent, and an orderly. “Please don’t.”

Hannibal looked up again, and be it the panicked expression in Will’s eyes, or the remembrance of how much it’d hurt him to hurt Will with Molly, but something in his eyes softened. He pursed his lips and nodded, just once. Will nodded back, just once.

“I like you in my clothing,” he said, and at the distinct turn of conversation Will found himself flustered.

“What?”

“It suits you,” he added, and the hungry, possessive look was deliciously depraved.

Will found it best not to answer. He couldn’t have been sure if the answer would have been appropriate for a breakfast table.

After breakfast –a fruit medley with the creamiest parfait Will had ever tasted in his entire life –took them to the neighboring town an hour and a half away that did indeed boast a small art gallery. At Will’s insistence, they wore hats and layers of clothes that wouldn’t immediately identify them. Hannibal drew the line at sunglasses, though.

“You can’t see the art properly if you are looking through tinted lenses,” he rebuked.

By the time they gained admittance, Will wasn’t sure whether to call it a dream or a state of limbo. The vertigo at attending an art gallery with Hannibal Lecter of all people was enough to make him laugh so hard he cried into his stupid pamphlet, and when a girl with two perfectly matching brown eyes eyed them and smiled with want and hope for her own future, it made his chest squeeze tight.

“They haven’t changed much in the years it’s been, but they do boast one such piece I’d like to see,” Hannibal said, walking along the walls and stopping every so many steps to eye a particularly riveting design.

Sometimes, Will let him draw ahead in order to watch his gait, the smooth and assured way in which his hips twisted just slightly, the way his shoulders stayed straight. The mark of a hunter. He was content to watch, to observe. He'd never really seen Hannibal outside of handcuffs, no matter how much Hannibal claimed to know of him during his college years. There was a passion, an energy radiating just off of the edges of his clothing that made him enticing, the ripest fruit at the tallest part of the tree. If Hannibal noticed it – and surely he had to, with as many times as Will had done it –he made no comment. His eyes were for the art, the oil paintings rendered with such skill and passion.

It wasn't until the final piece, one boasting a short visit before being returned to the London Art Gallery that Will found himself observing the art as much as he was observing Lecter. Years since school robbed him of the name of it, but as he stared at the painting, he found something odd inside of him that took away the ability to form coherent speech.

"Mars and Venus," Hannibal murmured, his breath tickling the edge of Will's ear. He gave a small start, unaware that he'd moved close enough to touch hands to the velvet rope that kept him from the painting. "Botticelli, circa 1483."

Will didn't say anything. He was at a distinct loss for words.

"It is an allegory to love and valor, but one of my favorite arguments is the supposition that love conquers war." A hand glided along his hip before pausing, and Will didn't think to brush it away. "Do you think so, Dr. Graham? Can love conquer war?"

"I think it softens it. Waves against the shore, beating rock to dust and sand."

"How he dozes, unassuming of her alert manner and ability to pierce him where he lays. Love makes us blind, makes us ignore the things we'd normally see within an instant. Do you suppose she means to kill him with it?"

Will swallowed with difficulty. "Maybe in the last moment, she'd wake him so that he saw when he was beaten."

"Would she give him a chance to make amends before she pierced him? Or would she only let him see his defeat before striking?"

Will thought of the small cell phone tucked away in his wallet, and he twitched a shoulder into a shrug. He thought of his mismatched eyes and how brazen he was in the open with them, even as they were 'on the run'. His borrowed pants itched with the secret, and he scratched the side of his neck.

"I think it depends on just what Mars did to Venus to make her feel the need to aim a lance at his face," he said. "Sometimes, love is the killing blow, and it's not one you can recover from."

"Does love destroy? Or does it only create anew?"

"Love is a poison," said Will quietly. "Some people fight the effects, others succumb completely. War, despite his nature, seemed to comply well enough. That was ultimately his

downfall."

"You've decided just what Venus will do when Mars wakes, then?" Hannibal wondered.

"I think so," he said heavily. He peeked up at Venus' eyes, quelled under the look of her perfect, calm assurance. "She has mismatched eyes."

"Botticelli purposefully kept Mars' eyes closed, that you could not see whether or not he was her intended."

"We have mismatched eyes."

A grin against the shell of his ear, a teasing tingle of pleasure that snaked downwards. "That we do."

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On the steps of the art gallery, as Hannibal left to pull the car around, Will fumbled for the small phone, cradling it like it was a fragile, delicate bird. He stared down at it with perfect, calm assurance, and he dropped it to the ground, marveling at the sound it made when it hit. He sighed, considered it, and he decidedly crushed it under his shoe. When Hannibal pulled up to the curb, he climbed into the car and allowed his hand to be taken, a kiss pressed to the center of his palm.

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Dinner was light, and the French doors were open to the elements as they ate, although at the mention of wine, Will was quick to decline. Off the bandwagon, but not under the wheels he'd told himself. Despite his lack of European grooming, he found himself eating with the tines down, small cuts of pork along a blackberry hoisin ginger sauce.

The wind was cool against his back, the air tangy with the comings of a storm. Occasionally, Hannibal would reach out and drag his fingers over the back of Will's hand, like he had to reassure himself that it was not a dream that he was free. Will allowed it, intrigued by the action that gave Hannibal an almost human appearance rather than the monster Will knew him to be.

He played music after, and Will laid on the ground with his hands over his eyes, letting the bold, tender notes wash over him. There were little to no words, little to no thought in their behaviors around one another, an action and reaction from something that required no verbal agreement. Despite the storm on the way that let thunder rumble in the distance, he felt quite calm –dare he say content.

Exposed as he was to Hannibal, the whisper to touch wasn't so all-encompassing. It was there, but it was a gentle whisper, a reminder that the world stopped spinning around so dizzyingly when he was touching him.

“You cover your eyes to better hear the notes.” Hannibal said, stroking the keys with utmost reverence. Will felt his gaze on him, and he liked it.

“When I walked through a crime scene, sometimes I’d take off my shoes and only wear the cloth boots they handed out with the gloves. I heard better then, too.”

“What sort of things did you hear?”

“Things like this. Things like…something too silent. Walls draped in tears, longing laid out in the crudest form, passion that made the air smell like hate and shoe polish. Serenades. Discontented sighs.” A pause as he thought of Mrs. Hess’ bedroom. “The sound of screaming. Naked flesh and skin parting under eager blades.”

“Beautiful,” Hannibal murmured, and his playing paused, the hum of the strings surrounding them, fading slow and quiet out to the building storm.

The breeze teased the bottom of Will’s slacks. Hannibal found him beautiful.

“Did you avoid eyes because of the shell your father became, living a life without the one thing the chemicals in his mind demanded he needed, apart from oxygen and sustenance?” he wondered; his voice was just low enough that Will could have ignored it in favor of the gentle hum of the F harmonic minor scale he began.

“Quid pro quo?”

“If you like.” A teasing lull in his tone. “If you have need, dear Will.”

Dear Will. Good-fucking-god. “My father did what he could, and he made no excuses for the pain he felt at my mother leaving.”

“You saw it, though. Your empathy made it so that you always saw, even when you tried not to.”

“…Even without soulmates, eyes still show too much.” A short, quiet breath. Hannibal shifted to Clair de Lune, a piece he recognized from enough romantic comedies on the couch with Molly, knee pressed to knobby knee. “Like covering my eyes to hear the music; I think better when I’m not distracted by the eyes.”

A soft hum of understanding. Will felt a question on his lips, and he pressed his hands down harder to his eyes to concentrate on it.

“Would you take me to Florence if I asked you to?”

“Will you kill Dolarhyde, since I asked you to?”

Will curled his bottom lip into his mouth, wet it, and sighed. He kept his hands pressed over his eyes. “Maybe.”

“A maybe is far better than a no,” Hannibal said. “No matter how one tilts their head to look at it.”

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know you were expecting angry hate/love/angst sex, but I feel like the moment he saw that, it would have stopped him in his tracks since he sat in a blood-stained cop car for at least 5 hours of almost constant driving. They got a date though, right? ;)

Again, I am just so floored by all of your support and kindness as I write this! You guys honestly are the best that I have ever experienced in any fandom, and I am so excited to continue working on this one and other fics.

Song Inspiration: 'Everlong' by Foo Fighters (the acoustic version for this specific chapter)

One Hungry Maroon, One Seeing Blue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 18:

It was the lightning that woke him, followed by the peal of thunder that shook the air around them. Will jolted, stared up at the ceiling, then pulled himself out of bed. With the curtains open, the doors that led to the small balcony overlooking the ocean was ethereal, and he let the cool metal of the handle shock his skin awake.

Unheeding of the downpour, Will stepped out onto the balcony, allowing himself to become drenched. He stared out at the roiling ocean, black with its fury, then to the clouds so heavy with pitch that the space where they ended and the ocean began was non-existent. Something boiled beneath his skin, tempted him to jump. He swayed forward, found himself swaying back.

He covered his eyes to better feel the rain, and he sighed, the sound just quiet enough that the downpour didn't let it carry farther than his mouth. He lowered his hands, grasped the rail just in front of him and stared out, searching for something he knew he wouldn't find.

"Are you awake?"

"I'd say I've been dreaming this entire time, if I didn't know better."

A soft hum, drowned out by the sound of the rainfall. "In many cultures, rain offers the promise of rebirth," Hannibal said from just behind him. Will hadn't heard him walk up, but he'd felt him wake; his body wasn't sure what to do with the constant contact after so long of fleeting, desperate doses. It was all too hyperaware of where Hannibal was at any given moment.

"Life begins again with rain," Will said. He thought of spring, sharp bursts of green a stark relief to the brown earth and dead leaves of winter.

"Are you baptizing yourself?"

"Can something as easy as this wash away my sins?" Will wondered. He tilted his head back and basked in the cold, unrelenting torrent raining down on him. He imagined it carrying away the black, ugly marks of his dark deeds. He imagined Molly standing in it too, each raindrop healing just a little bit more of her.

"If you decide that it can, it can," Hannibal said. He moved so that he stood shoulder-to-shoulder beside Will, and he tilted his head up, a soft sigh escaping him. Will didn't hear it so much as *feel* it.

"Did you whisper in Gideon Abel's ear to kill Matthew Brown?" he asked.

“Do you ask to lessen your guilt?”

“He focused so much on my being polite and other people not,” Will said. “It made me think of your trial, when they showed images of the man you impaled with every weapon in his shop.”

“Oh?”

“Matthew Brown was impaled.”

“Do you suppose one would have to try very hard to convince a serial killer to kill again?” Hannibal wondered. “Do you think that maybe a mere whisper of the indignity, the invasion of privacy would be enough? Or do you think one would have to be blunt with someone such as Dr. Gideon to get the things they wanted?”

“I think his psyche is fractured enough that you didn’t have to do much,” Will said. He licked the rainfall off of his lips. “He already disliked him, and you were…”

“I was?” Hannibal prompted when he didn’t continue.

“…Trying to make up for what you’d done the only way you knew how,” Will realized. “You wouldn’t kill yourself –you love yourself. But you could kill Matthew Brown for helping.”

“And you can kill Red Dragon for taking part.”

“I’m struggling to reconcile the pieces of you,” Will admitted. Lighting danced across the sky above him, made his vision go white. The resulting thunder rattled his teeth.

“Just as you can smile at the next door neighbor, then return inside and wonder at the texture of blood on your fingertips, so too can I enjoy the simple nature of a home cooked meal and the exhilarating sensation of taking something unkempt and being the crafter that elevates it to art.”

“Is it that easy?”

“If you let it.” A pause as they both enjoyed the sound of the rain on the stone beneath their bare feet. “You struggle with such understanding because you struggle with reconciling those aspects of yourself. If it did not bother you to see it inside of yourself, it wouldn’t bother you so very much when you saw it in me.”

Will looked at him, hair plastered to his forehead, and as lightning arced overhead again, it illuminated his eyes, one Will’s and one his very own. This time, it was Will that moved forward, and he grabbed him by the back of the neck in order to pull him in for a kiss, something that smelled of the salt of the ocean and the crisp texture of bark cut to reveal the green skin beneath.

Lips moved against one another, searching, seeking. It was not before, when they’d all but attempted to rip one another apart with their bare hands, but something softer, something almost sweet. When the thunder ricocheted through his ribs, Will wrapped his

arms tight around him, and as kisses and bites were pressed down the vulnerable part of his throat, he looked up to the rainfall above and decided that whether or not the rain could wash them clean, he'd take them as is, regardless.

They found their way back to the bed once more, sodden clothes abandoned across the floor, the doors left open to tease their skin with a hungry breeze. Legs intertwined, breath shared, Will lay poised above him, forehead pressed to forehead. His skin, slick with water, was cool to the touch despite the heat burning inside of him.

"What do you want, Will?" Hannibal asked. He drew his bottom lip into his mouth, nipped.

"I want you," Will whispered. A shudder ran down his spine, his hips rolling down with the sensation. *I want, I want, I want.*

"Every aspect of me?" A catch of breath, hands settling on Will's hips to guide them down again to waiting, wanting flesh.

"All of it. All of it," he whispered, entranced with the way lightning lit up Hannibal's face. "A match for a match, an eye for an eye."

"An eye for an eye," Hannibal repeated, tone low and rough with desire. He bit his lip again, and he nodded. "My dear Will, I think I can return in kind."

His kiss was scalding, and as they rolled across the sheets and became tangled around one another's flesh, Will became drunk off of the sound of sweet promises Hannibal whispered into his ear the entire night.

-

When he dreamed, he saw a thousand mirrors. The light bounced off of one another, and when he reached out to touch one, they shattered around him, leaving him in a graveyard of a thousand reflections. Someone reached out and offered him his eyes, and he took them back, thankful.

-

He felt Hannibal's heartbeat when he woke. Will blinked lazily up at the ceiling, and just as much as he was aware of textures –the pillowcase against his neck, the thin membrane of his skin –he was aware of the way a heartbeat echoed his. He inhaled, and Hannibal inhaled. He exhaled, Hannibal exhaled.

Dazedly, he remembered the studies of intimacy among soulmates, the chemical reaction to arousal, to release. The more emotional, physical, and verbal the contact, the stronger the bond. The first time was always the most intense. Any time after was an echo of the passion, the feeling of complete, total 'one-ness' that occurred. A sense of peace, that something in the world was just *right*.

He passed fingers over the arm slung possessively across his waist, hummed low in his throat at the sensation of pleasant dreams beside him. For once, his mind was quiet, an undisturbed pool of water that was clear all the way to the bottom. Francis Dolarhyde was at the bottom, but he was waiting. Waiting for what? Will wondered. Something…something to shift. Something to change. Will certainly felt shifted, changed.

Perhaps Dolarhyde meant to slice him in half in order to take something precious away from Hannibal. Perhaps that was his final becoming, now that they'd consummated their connection.

The thought should have scared him, but it didn't. He continued to stare up at the ceiling, content with the quiet, content with Hannibal's heartbeat.

Truth be told, he hadn't been content for a long, long time. Even before Red Dragon. Even before Hobbs.

Hannibal woke the way Will supposed most practiced killers did –a sudden, smooth transition noted only by the shift in his breathing. His grip tightened on Will's waist, his thumb brushing over a small, finger-shaped bruise.

"I saw your dreams," he said by way of greeting. Will nodded.

"I thought you would."

"Is that normal, Dr. Graham? So far after a connection?" There was a teasing rasp to his tone, his mouth curling around his title as he slid closer to press a kiss into the hollow of his throat where a love bite lay.

"That is something unique to us, since you've seen quite a few of my dreams long after the initial connection." His breath caught, held. His fingers curled into Hannibal's skin.

"Unique," Hannibal repeated, and his lips worked along Will's collarbone, pausing at the place where the arm met the shoulder. "Yes, I'd say we are utterly unique."

"I wonder how he's choosing them," Will said. Red Dragon lay coiled at the bottom of the pool in his mind. Watching. Waiting.

Hannibal hmm'd quietly, nipped his skin. "I thought you'd have figured it out by now."

"Affluent families, lives of perfect appearance –they both have two car garages."

"They also have soulmates," Hannibal drawled. "Did your family have a two car garage, Will?"

"No." Will idly bit his thumb, staring at the ceiling. "We're a lot alike."

"Yes," he agreed, and it was somehow better to hear that rather than a laundry list from Alana about all of the ways they weren't alike. "We are born with our natures, much like we are born with our pancreas and spleen."

“You surgically removed those from people,” Will pointed out.

A huff of laughter, fingertips gliding across the ribs just under his chest. “Would you remove your nature with surgical precision if you felt that you’d survive the separation?”

“It’s…useful,” he replied, and it didn’t condemn so much as reveal.

“As are the claws in the paw of a cat, or the incisors in a bear. We don’t blame them for possession of deadly capabilities.”

“I feel you in my skin,” he murmured, and he wasn’t just talking about the soulmate bond.

“And I taste you on my tongue.” A grin against his flesh that felt too-sensitive for such a subtle touch. “Is this where I tell you to run along?”

“If you like.” He rolled over so that he was straddling Hannibal, knees pressed tight against his sides. “I may not listen.”

Will dipped his head down for a kiss to waiting, wanting lips.

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He was standing out by the Cliffside when someone approached him that distinctly wasn’t Hannibal. He glanced to the side warily, a young woman that appeared Japanese in heritage and distinctly unamused in expression.

“You’re Will Graham,” she said. She stood beside him, just far enough away that he couldn’t reach out to touch.

“Yes.” A beat. “Chiyoh?” he ventured.

“Yes.”

She had matching eyes and a flat, composed expression. Around them, the air smelled clean, the effects of a long rain that washed everything away.

“You’re Hannibal’s soulmate,” she said, but it didn’t sound like what she really wanted to say.

“Yes.” The word prickled as much as it warmed.

“You’re not like other soulmates,” she tried again.

“Aren’t we?”

“You’re hiding something, and there’s a man in the woods that’s made notice of this house. Hannibal doesn’t seem concerned. He told me not to shoot him.”

Will studied the waves and nodded. Beneath the clear pool of his mind, Red Dragon was pushing up from the floor to break the surface. Somewhere hours away, Jack Crawford paced the confines of his office and wondered if he'd been played by Will. Hours from that office, Frederick Chilton lay in agonizing pain as doctors attempted skin grafts. Down the road from there, Matthew Brown lay to rest in a coffin. Even farther than that, Molly took her medicine for a shoulder sundered by Red Dragon. A ripple effect, and all roads led back to Will.

"Do you shoot many people in the woods?" he asked.

"Trespassers get warning shots. This isn't a trespasser, it's a beast." Will liked her way of thinking. It was short, pointed. No waste for the bouquets of flowered speech.

"A Great, Red Dragon," he corrected her.

"Are you going to make me regret not shooting you?" she asked.

Are you going to put Hannibal in harm's way?

"…I think that remains to be seen," he said after a prolonged pause. He tasted her disappointment at the back of his throat, like bile.

"I never thought Hannibal would have a soulmate," she said, and despite her even, controlled tone, it smacked of something an awful lot like the sharing of a secret.

"Me neither," Will agreed.

They stood like that for some time, watching the waves beat furiously against the craggy rocks below. The ocean was so dark a blue that it resembled a violent bruise as it churned, white froth cresting the resilient stone. Will felt a second away from leaping. He felt a second away from falling back.

Chiyoh left him there, tasting the sharp relief of the changing wind in the air, and he decided that if she shot him, it'd be fair enough. If she didn't, it'd also be fair enough. Somewhere hours away, Jack Crawford wondered if he'd been betrayed.

-

Another elegant dinner, although this time Will helped dice vegetables. Quiet, calm opera played throughout the room, lulled him into a dream-like state where there was almost a domestic bliss to their actions, not the preparations to a final supper. After Chiyoh's warning, there was the sensation of being suspended in air, waiting for the drop.

"I met Chiyoh," he said, offering up diced carrots.

"Did she warn you as she warned me?" Hannibal asked.

"Yes."

"She must like you, in some form of fashion."

Hannibal's cousin liked him. Coupled with the odd sensation of vertigo, Will couldn't help but laugh. Just a few of months ago, he sat in a kitchen eating homemade pizza and fretting about the change. He wondered if Mrs. Panter or Mrs. Hess feared change before it happened to them. He wondered if they understood in the aftermath.

"It wasn't social media; they weren't in similar groups," he said.

"No," Hannibal replied.

"No legalities that intertwined family names, no school connections, familial connections, or work connections."

"Pretty homes, pretty wives, pretty lives," Hannibal intoned, setting meat in the pan. It hissed and spit at the contact to the metal.

"The new mirrors are shatter-resistant now," Will said, thinking of the Panter household, now that no Panter would ever live in it again. He wondered if it'd sold already.

"What were his interests, Will?"

"Photography. Before he faked his death to his wife, he worked at a film development place."

"Did you take photographs, to better understand his passion for it?"

Will wasn't quite sure how Hannibal knew that, but he did. "Yes."

"What did you feel, holding a camera poised before happy couples with mismatched eyes and lips wide with the sort of smile that hurt your own jaw?" He poured sherry into the pan, and Will watched the flames lick up along the sides, hungry.

"Hungry."

"And?"

"Covetous." The breath left him, and he nodded, seeing. *Seeing*. "He was finding them long before he faked his death. He wanted to protect Reba, but he also knew Red Dragon would take hold regardless. If he found enough to feed him, he wouldn't go back for Reba."

A pleased, knowing smile flickered along Hannibal's face, then was gone. He walked over to the small island where Will paused in the mincing of mushrooms, and he picked up a small bowl housing garlic. Will tracked his movement, relished in the hitched gait of his steps. Relished in the knowledge that *he* put it there.

"His work at the film development agency gave him access to thousands of families from all around whose lives were picture perfect," Will said to Hannibal's back. "He had the pleasure of being able to choose at his leisure. Take notes, keep addresses, then the bastard went on as he liked."

“He once showed me a notebook of names, phone numbers, and addresses,” Hannibal admitted guiltlessly. “I thought it rather quaint, his needing to write it down.”

“You drew some of your best art,” Will said. The word ‘art’ echoed in his head, and he grimaced at the way it sounded. Admiring rather than condemning. “That’s how Alana found you out.”

“The mushrooms, Will,” Hannibal reminded him. Will didn’t resist the hint of a smirk on his lips as he dipped his head to mince mushrooms.

They ate in the formal dining room, something Will didn’t miss as a symbolic and mildly pretentious act on Hannibal’s part. He didn’t mind it, though, the ceremony. The knowledge of the *how* sat heady and hot in his stomach, therefore the inevitable death of Red Dragon was assured. Assured, but…not yet quite alright. He thought of Hannibal’s question, his request.

There was something just so utterly *good* about doing bad things to bad people.

He wasn’t sure how he knew they weren’t alone; the hair on the back of his neck prickled, and his grip on the fork tightened. He looked to Hannibal, Hannibal looked back, and Will was struck with the sensation that how had he ever thought Hannibal didn’t look *just right* with one eye blue, the other maroon. His mouth opened, intending to say something much like that.

Then he toppled from his chair with the force of a bullet bursting through his mouth.

He’d been gutted before; that’d been a dizzying sensation where each pulse of breath seemed to take more and more from him as he spilled blood across the floor with a numbing, gushing feeling right around his intestines. He’d been too shocked to hurt, his brain tamping down the pain at the utter *surprise* of it.

This was not that. Not in the least.

A hot, piercing pain inflamed his cheek as he fell, and when he hit the ground there was a rush of blood that filled his mouth and poured down the back of his throat as he instinctively swallowed, a curse on his lips that was never heard because the poignant *hurt* snuffed the sound out of him. Each move of his mouth sent waves along his head, making his eyes water, making his nose flare at the scent.

He was aware of glass shattering. The sound of a chair scraping, footsteps heavy. Then he was up, and he’d never felt more alive.

Red Dragon looked stronger, darker. More capable than before, when he’d only barely just devoured *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun*. Now, he’d had time to devour, to Become. He swung the gun towards Hannibal, but Hannibal’s hands were fast, and a knife glinted in the lowlight before the gun fell and a guttural snarl of pain made Red Dragon pull back, retract. A steak knife jutted out of his hand, the juxtaposition startling in the ambient light.

Without a thought, Will tackled him back out of the house and down onto the grass, rolling with the force of it, slamming them into the pile of wood that rested near a burn pit. Small cut-outs along the metal of the burn pit resembled wolves in mid-run, and they seemed to snarl, leap. Something bit into the space just under his collarbone, seared flesh with steel, and Will snarled, thumbs coming down onto a struggling face with teeth copper-colored in the moonlight. The moon was fat, full. The bastard waited for a full moon.

Thumbs pressed into eyes, and at the choking scream the hair on Will's neck prickled, rose. Blood burst against his thumbs, ran down the face to coat his hands and into the short, buzzed hair of Red Dragon. A force bred of pain lifted, threw. Will had the sensation of flying, then falling, hitting the ground hard. The breath left him, and he wheezed as he scrambled to his feet, pulling the knife from him that Hannibal deemed fit to leave in Red Dragon's palm.

They considered one another, one watching, one sniffing the air like he could track by scent alone. Waiting. Breath panted from Will, even as it singed his cheeks, even as it ached his ribs. Blood trailed down Red Dragon's jaws, cheeks, chin, like scarlet tears.

"You can't have a soulmate if you don't have eyes," Will taunted him, just loud enough to be heard. Red Dragon charged, and Will met him halfway, slamming into him with a force that rattled teeth, bruised bones. He pulled his face away from teeth that snapped, and he slammed the knife into his throat. As given, so returned, and a guttural gasp scratched past his ear.

He wasn't fast enough, though; Red Dragon knew he would use the knife to stab, to take. As quickly as it delved in, it was removed, and Will was met with a crippling sensation as something got him in the back, enough that it dropped him, enough that it made lights dance before his eyes, threatened to make him pass out from the pain alone that screamed ***NO.***

He fell to the side, hands grasping at the knife. He pulled it out and rolled onto his back, wheezing, hisses of breath that made the openings in his cheeks sing sweet misery. His eyes rolled to the back of his head, dark waves rising up, but he held fast, something whispering in his blood that he'd blinded the Red Dragon, but Red Dragon didn't need eyes to *see*.

"See?" Garrett Jacob Hobbs whispered, bleeding life out onto the floor. *"...See?"*

"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born," Red Dragon rasped. The words were heavy, coarse, broken between a ruined windpipe and the horrendous teeth in his mouth, but Will knew them and knew them well.

He stood, and the moonlight above caressed him, bathed in him a light that turned the blood trailing down Red Dragon's cheeks a shiny black. Did it bolster Red Dragon as much as it did him? He bared his teeth, considered the knife in his slick hands. Considered the axe sitting just to the side of the wood pile.

He moved, and Red Dragon lunged with the sound, head bobbing low to hear him. He missed, and Will ran to the axe, lifting it up twisting with the force of it, a sickening sound of metal meeting skin and bone as it connected. Red Dragon gave chase, and Will Graham followed through. He stumbled, though, fell with it, and as Red Dragon collapsed to the ground, lungs giving way to the hands of man, he keened, low and coarse.

"*See*?" Will whispered, climbing on top of him. He grabbed him by the throat, gripped tight. "*...See?*"

Red Dragon tried to pry his vice-like grip from his throat, but he couldn't. Blood gushed over his hands, hot and very much alive. Sightless, mutilated eyes gaped, unseeing, and in their lack of sight Will saw.

"See?" he murmured, and he felt when the breath didn't come, when the limbs stopped moving. The mouth, fish-like as it fought for air stilled, and the eyeless, gaping holes stared up, up, up where the moon shone high above them, bathing them in its heavenly glow.

With a soundless death rattle, Red Dragon was no more.

He slid off of him when he was sure, when his hands cramped with the effort. Dazedly, he blinked past waves of pain, adrenaline making his skin sensitive to touch, to live inside. Should he peel it off? Layer by layer until he saw bone?

He was aware of too much, of footsteps breaking blades of grass, clicking across the tile of the small eating area now slick with gore. Waves crashed below, hungry, and just above the stars bore witness. Red Dragon was no more because Will devoured him. They saw. They could *see*.

Someone helped him up; Hannibal, Hannibal. He stumbled, righted himself, and Will lifted shining eyes to a face of pleasant hunger.

"It's black in the moonlight," he said, and his cheeks fucking *burned*.

"How do you feel, Will?" Hannibal asked him. Dazedly, Will noted his arm, blood trailing down the crisp white shirt, and he lifted hands to press to the wound. As he did, his own arm hissed, spit, cursed. He could *feel* it.

"Alive," he murmured, and he looked to Hannibal's mismatched eyes, stunned. "I feel very alive."

"And the Great Red Dragon?"

"I ate him," he whispered, wet his lips stained with blood. A dizzying rush took his legs out from under him, and he fell against Hannibal, pressed his forehead to his throat. It wasn't like the nurse, Lecter's pulse maintaining calm. His heart hammered in his throat, hammered against Will's skin, and he nodded with it, bunching the material of Hannibal's shirt under his hands that ached from stealing the breath from someone.

He looked up at Hannibal, grabbed his face and held it. He swept thumbs across his cheeks, and if he minded the blood smeared over his skin, he didn't say anything. Hannibal pressed his forehead to Will's, and Will inhaled the taste of him.

"I'm hurting," he realized, and the burning, numbing sensation at his back clawed its way to his brain.

"In this moment, you are at your most beautiful," Hannibal whispered, and arms came around to hold him. A hand passed along the back of his hair, soothing in its ministrations. Hannibal's own face was sickly pale. "Are you going to kill me now, dear Will?"

A shudder down his back at the pain radiating from kidney to spine, settling on his shoulder where Hannibal had been wounded. He wanted to *touch*. His brain reasoned that he should sleep. "I want to sleep, first. Then we'll talk about that in the morning."

He didn't sleep, but Hannibal did put him under anesthesia so that he could prevent him from dying. As he was going under, Will thought that it was a rather nice thing for him to do.

Chapter End Notes

Sometimes when I do stuff like this, I really don't know how to begin an author's note. Mostly there's a 'well...that happened' like I had no control over it, but tbh I don't always feel like I have control over my writing. I may have an idea, but it honestly does what it likes and I just have to go along for the ride. Then later, I look back at it to edit and I'm like 'well...whatever took over had a better idea than me.'

So...that happened. :)

We've got two chapters left on this, y'all, one chapter left on Magnum Opus and one Hannibal POV prologue on Dread and Hunger. Idk how to process that, but all that I can say is I've honestly appreciated every single moment you guys have taken to tell me just how much you appreciate my writing. I don't really have articulate words that can aptly convey just how much fun it's been and how touched I've been by the comments/notes/messages/support I've been so freely given. I just kind of want to button smash my keyboard because that random grouping of letters in a weird, indiscernible noise would probably explain my thanks so much more. :)

Song Inspiration: 'Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) -Emily Browning

Two Eyes Glazed with Dreams

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 19:

Will woke with a distinct pain that started with his mouth and radiated down to hips. He had no dreams; his mind was blank, a pool of black water with a full moon glowing across it. The pool where Red Dragon once lurked; where he'd never lurk again. After a beat, Will realized the pool wasn't black, but red with blood. Blood in the moonlight looked black, although the distinct sheen remained the same.

Hannibal must have sensed when he woke because he walked in moments later with a small lap tray. At Will's stupefied, confused expression, he set the tray down and extended legs on either side of it so that it rested just above him. A small, porcelain bowl held pills, and a much deeper bowl held what he expected to be soup, although it was covered at the moment.

"You're in pain," he observed.

"…How long was I out?" Will croaked. He looked dumbly from the bowl, then up to Hannibal's serene expression.

"Three days."

"Three *days*?"

"I had to save your kidney. He tried to get the artery near it, but he thankfully missed." A pause as he messed with the pillows behind Will, adjusting them so that he could sit up farther, but only just. "Do you recall consciousness at all?"

"…No."

A soft humming, and a nod. "I'd wondered. You made use of the lavatory, so I didn't find it pertinent to get a colostomy bag. You were distinctly unaware of yourself, though, as well as your surroundings."

He'd had one of *those* before. Pretty happy he didn't have to undergo that a second time, let alone at the hands of Hannibal.

"Where's…"

"You should eat, Will. You should also take your medicine."

He would have probably argued, but the pain was acute. Just the few words he managed made his cheeks ache, made them threaten to break what he suspected to be stitches.

“He missed my teeth,” he mumbled, removing the lid from the soup. It was a broth that smelled suspiciously like miso, and his stomach let out a loud, needful growl.

“I’m grateful he did; I was a surgeon, not a dentist.”

He would have smiled, but he suspected it’d hurt to do so. Instead, he took the deep-set spoon and worked on sipping down the hot, rich broth that sat on his tongue and reminded him it’d been days since he’d brushed his teeth.

“We can’t stay here, Hannibal,” Will said quietly. Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed and nodded.

“Is the phone you kept hidden in your wallet still there, dear Will?” Will didn’t bother asking how he knew about it. He’d stripped his clothes off, laid in bed with him as he struggled to connect the pieces of himself together. No doubt he’d also gone through what little he’d brought with him, keen on seeing just what sort of Will Graham was the one that’d helped him escape.

“No, but it’s an hour and a half away. Enough that Jack may get desperate and do a pinwheel search. Track us with dogs.”

“Love chose War, then,” Hannibal murmured, whether to himself or Will, Will couldn’t say. He looked distinctly pleased, a soft, barely-there flicker of relief.

“He’ll track us with dogs,” Will said again, pointedly.

“You’re still too injured to travel,” Hannibal pointed out.

“We may just have to get over that.”

With another successful spoonful, he took the myriad of pills, trusting that one of them wasn’t lethal. He supposed that if Hannibal wanted to kill him, he wouldn’t do something so stupid as to poison the meat. Death should be *intimate*.

“Then you’ve decided?”

“It wasn’t apparent when I killed Red Dragon?” Will said. Saying it was harder than thinking it. He rolled the words around in his mouth, then managed another spoonful. Eating was harder than it sounded. Admitting he choked the life out of Francis Dolarhyde was harder than it sounded.

“You said you’d tell me my fate when you woke next,” Hannibal said, a murmur of pleasure in his voice. “I’ve waited with…*rapt* attention.”

Are you going to kill me, now?

“…I felt your shoulder wound,” Will said, not looking at him. “It felt like my own, and suddenly I didn’t feel my pain anymore because your pain was more important.”

“I certainly felt your pain,” said Hannibal genially. “You felt very much alive. And wounded.”

“I think it’d feel much worse to kill you than it would be to live with you.”

“The pains of a soulmate bond, or so I’ve been roundly informed.”

“I don’t know if it’s just the soulmate bond, Hannibal.”

There it was. Out in the open, on display like his chest, where he could now see small places of black, bruised flesh from his fight. He wondered what his back looked like. Decided he didn’t want to see it. Didn’t want to see his face either, messed up and pretty ugly as it most likely was, what with the hole that’d been ripped through him.

“You said that the pains of losing the soulmate-”

“I know what I said,” he snapped. “I know what I fucking said, but I also said it’s a *choice* to be with your soulmate. Soulmate connections aren’t the end-all, they aren’t…all encompassing. I was never forced, no matter what anyone tries to claim. No soulmate connection made me convince Jack Crawford to let you loose on Red Dragon, *I* did that.”

“In the end, it was you who were let loose onto Red Dragon, not I,” Hannibal pointed out softly. Just enough that Will had to lean in to catch it.

“…He thought to make you his final piece in his becoming,” Will admitted to the miso soup. The pills sat heavy in his stomach, and he forced another sip of broth down so that he wouldn’t get sick. “If anyone is going to kill you, Hannibal, it’ll be me.”

“Do you mean to say that you feel that your regards for me transcend the chemical reaction of our eyes, Dr. Graham?” Hannibal wasn’t grinning, but it felt like it. Will took another pointed sip of his soup.

“I’m saying Jack may think I’m some kind of hostage, maybe. I’m thinking, ‘We get out of here under that guise, I can talk us out of it if we get caught.’”

“Talk yourself out, you mean?”

“Talk you into an arrest rather than a shoot on sight,” Will said flatly.

“You’d have me in chains, behind iron bars, at your beck and call for when you deem it necessary to come again.” Hannibal’s lip curled, a hint of derision in the faint lines around his eyes.

“I’d have you any way that I can, if it’s all the same to you,” Will retorted. He took another sip of soup. “Alive is preferable. If the only way I can have you alive is in a mental institution, then, well…” A shrug, despite the fact that the idea of seeing him behind bars made his joints hurt. “…I got you out for a reason, though. I got you out.” Yes, Will, not Hannibal. He’d lied to many people, but he wouldn’t lie to himself about that.

“Do you think that now that you’ve killed Francis Dolarhyde, Molly-dearest will take you back?”

“No,” Will snapped. “I wasn’t even thinking of Molly at all when I killed him, I was thinking about *you*. Everything I’ve done since that fucking day when you grabbed me has been because of you, you indignant son-of-a-”

A kiss to the temple stilled his words. He gritted his teeth, regretted it. His cheeks ached.

“You can’t blame me for wanting to crawl under your skin when you make it so easy, dear Will,” he said into his hair. “Thank you.”

“Thank you?” Will felt an odd, dizzying sensation. Was that the pills? Had Hannibal fucking *drugged* him?

“You told me everything that I needed to know.”

Bubbles burst across his vision, and he found himself laying back, dazed, looking to Hannibal’s face that seemed to be everywhere at once yet nowhere at all.

“I hate you,” he promised, and a low rumble of laughter soothed his ears.

“I know.”

-

He woke on a train, although how he got on a train was far beyond him. Awareness came in waves, slow and lazy like the push and pull of the wheels on the tracks. The room was dim, only the two lamps across the way that illuminated a padded bench and cast malevolent shadows across the walls. The curtains were drawn on the window, the gait beneath him soothing. He lay on the bottom mattress of a bunkbed, blankets drawn up to his chin.

When he shifted, a sharp hiss passed through his teeth –that’s why he’d woken. The pain.

“…Hannibal?” he called out, looking just above him. The mattress above shifted, creaked. He tracked the motion of feet, calves, thighs, hips coming down the ladder near his head, then stared at the dim visage of a sleep-rumpled Hannibal, yawning like he had every right in the world to yawn.

“How are you feeling, Will?” he asked, kneeling down beside the bed.

“Distinctly uninformed and angry,” he said through gritted teeth.

“You really should find an outlet for that anger; it’s not healthy to keep it locked inside. You internalize too much,” Hannibal chided.

“I’ve got an idea on how to expel it,” he grunted, pushing the covers back. A plain white shirt, grey sweatpants. He glared down at them accusingly.

“We’re in Canada where we’ll catch a plane to France,” Hannibal replied. “I’d apologize, but it was much easier to transport you while unconscious rather than awake.”

“Fake ID’s?”

“You’re Mr. Aaron Schruut, if anyone asks.” A flash of teeth, sharp incisors good for tearing. Will mimicked the gesture.

“Who are you?”

“William Schruut, your domestic partner who is rather concerned about your care and aiding in your transport to Quebec for further tests and hospital aid from Hôpital Saint-François d’Assise.” A pause. “We couldn’t afford you to be life-flighted since it wasn’t an immediate risk,” he added dismally.

“And Chiyoh is…” he prompted.

“Our nurse, dutiful in keeping your vitals in check.”

“Fuck you,” Will said, and maybe it was the sleep but he sounded far too kind.

“You said Jack may entertain the notion of you being a hostage. Now, we can say for certain that if we are on any cameras, you look the hostage.” His eyes narrowed, possessive. “I’m merely listening to my domestic partner’s concerns and needs.”

“My concerns and needs are telling me that my kidney hurts,” Will returned, clipped.

Hannibal left through the sliding door whose glass was frosted for privacy, then returned with soup from the food car, as well as a small tray containing a bright array of pills. He helped Will sit up, and at the close proximity of his skin, Will felt a shiver down his spine, a slight whisper that everything was going to be alright. He couldn’t tell if that was the connection anymore, or if it was just him. He was too tired to care, in truth.

“You didn’t kill me,” he said, intercepting the spoon before Hannibal could bring it to his mouth. He’d kill again before he’d let someone spoon feed him like a child.

“I didn’t.”

“You could have.”

“Are you chastising me for a lost opportunity?” Hannibal wondered. He sat on the edge of the bed, head ducked so he didn’t smack it on the bunk above. “Or are you contemplating the idea of me suffering at the loss of your presence?”

“I dreamt that I had you tied to a tree,” Will finally said after swallowing down the soup. It was sad in comparison to the soup Hannibal had given him before, desolate noodles floating among a few carrots and questionable peas. No chicken. “A stag drew it taut around

you, choking you. Killing you. You said, ‘will you kill me for my darkness when you refuse to acknowledge yours?’”

“Then?” Hannibal prompted when Will didn’t continue.

“…I had it loosen the bindings.”

“You acknowledged yours,” Hannibal murmured.

“I took Red Dragon’s eyes so that even if he lived and I didn’t, he’d never find a soulmate. I robbed him of it, and I think that’s why I won.” A short breath as he looked down to his capable, wicked hands. “He knew that even living, he’d never see his art. He’d never see his becoming because I took away his ability to see anything at all.”

“*See?*” Hannibal recalled, eyes glittering. “Is that why you asked if he could *see*?”

“…He saw me take everything away from him. Even when he couldn’t see anymore, I made sure he fuckin' saw *that*.”

The spoon felt cheap in his hand, and he gripped it tightly. It didn’t give way the way he wanted it to; he pushed against the spoon, and it pushed back. He blinked, and he felt the click of his eyelids close, open.

“It wasn’t like Garrett Jacob Hobbs,” he shared. He didn’t like how his voice came out, all sorts of wrong, plaintive almost.

“You told me, ‘I feel alive.’ In that moment, you were very much alive, and made very aware of how close we walk the line between the living and the dead. That was *your* becoming, Will.” Hannibal tilted his head, reaching up to brush a stray curl back. “Do you regret your becoming? Do you regret taking the intrinsic responsibility of your life into your hands and making something beautiful of it?”

“I don’t regret it,” he said, “but…I…am not proud of how much I enjoyed it.”

“You should be. He almost took something special away from you, twice.”

Twice. First Molly, then Hannibal. First dear Molly, then Hannibal. Was Hannibal dear? Will distracted himself with the soup, ruminating on that question. Hannibal called him ‘dear Will’, but that was as much a jab towards how much their connection repulsed him as it was a term of endearment.

“You’re internalizing, dear Will,” Hannibal chastised lightly. “Why keep such delightful thoughts to yourself when you could bare them with equal frankness with me?”

“Are you playing games with me, Hannibal?” he asked bluntly. “Is this some fucking roundabout way to get me in the end?”

“It’d be easier to leave you a corpse beside the Red Dragon than to pack your unconscious body across state borders and fly internationally,” Hannibal replied. His expression was sanguine, tone melodic. “Come now, you’re smarter than that. Thrall me with

your acumen on how this would be worth it in the end for me, to take you across the world just to kill you."

Will didn't have much shrewd insight on the matter, not when the back corner of his hip felt like it was ripping itself to pieces with each breath he took. He was afraid of the idea of anything more than danger with Lecter, but he wasn't readily going to admit *that*.

Lecter placed his fingers on his pulse when his expression shifted, glanced to his watch to time it. He inhaled lightly, caught his breath, and nodded. "I see."

"You see what," he asked flatly.

"Fear makes you rude," he realized with delight. "It makes your mouth sharp, makes you push things away from you that you should pull close. Prey is composed of flight or fight, and you've spent quite a long time seeing yourself as prey rather than recognizing yourself as the hunter. The wolf in sheep's clothing."

"You think I'm afraid of you?"

"You're afraid to want me," he replied serenely. "Because even though you feel my desires, as base and easy as they are, you wonder if your games with me and my games with you could only amount to one of us sooner or later committing deadly acts of violence against the other."

"I asked you to take me to Florence," said Will.

"We're going to France, first."

"…I forgive you," he added. He looked down to his soup, then back up at Hannibal.

"And I forgive you as well," Hannibal replied. "There now. Easy as an Easter Sunday pie."

"I want to kiss you," Will informed him. The morphine was starting to kick in, and he felt it in his bones. He forced down another spoonful, glaring at Hannibal. "Or is it that you want to kiss me so bad I'm feeling it?"

Hannibal considered him, and Will wasn't sure if he wanted to kiss him, fuck him, or eat him. Probably a bit of all three. "Go to sleep, Will," he said lightly.

"Come to bed with me, and I will."

"That is a fair deal."

He managed one more spoonful before Hannibal took the tray away and set it to the side. It took a lot of coaxing, gentle shifting of hands that were surprisingly careful with his injuries, but Hannibal eventually lay on his side beside Will, and Will lay staring up at the bed above them. Hannibal's chest pressed to his shoulder was warm, and his fingertips traced along the skin of his neck, soothing and utterly blissful in the wake of the medicine that took the hurt away.

Hannibal kissed him, and Will dipped his head back, sinking into the standard issue train pillow that smelled an awful lot like the generic soap used at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He wondered if they bulk shopped at Cost-Co.

-

The train took them to a taxi that transported them to an airport. Chiyoh was their silent, watchful eye, dressed in scrubs and comfortable tennis shoes with a two inch lift. Will recognized them as the sort of tennis shoes most nurses wore, the kind with a roll-bar support to keep their plantar tendons friendly.

During transit between vehicles and trains and planes, he took his medicine and let the fog roll in on him. At the airport, words dizzying around his head, he knew that enough cameras saw him in such a state that Jack Crawford wouldn't feel betrayed –he'd merely feel stupid for letting Will get too close.

"Do you know much French, Aaron?" Hannibal asked him as they waited by the gate. Will slumped low in his wheelchair. He'd thought about fighting it and trying to walk himself, but the first step had him slumping back down and waving Chiyoh on to push. He'd felt Hannibal's smug amusement, even from where he strode ahead with a god damn Panama hat and sunglasses.

"We lived in Louisiana for a year or so, and I picked up some Creole," he said quietly. Some words stuck, although with the medication others were too rapid to cling. He let them bounce off, and he dozed in between bouts of awareness whenever Hannibal got up to move about. Half-asleep, he dreamed of the large, loud boats they'd ridden in a few times to meet up with family friends that lived along the swamps, fans screaming loud enough to make his ears ring.

He thought of hot days on boats in the canals, backs red and lips sticky with homemade sweet tea the product of too much sugar. Some dinners were nothing more than dirty rice and greasy hushpuppies –they'd lived like kings back then. He thought of car rides, moving vans, lakes that to him as a child seemed like oceans, boats that rocked him to sleep with the waves. Times were simpler back then, in their own way. He missed it. Memories moved across the back of his lids like slideshows, each one unique and calming, soothing in the way he treasured them for continuing to exist inside of him.

How Hannibal managed first class tickets, Will couldn't say. The seats turned into beds though, and partitions slid into place for privacy for the long trip overseas. Once he was laid out, Hannibal started to go to his own, but Will caught his hand, a lax hold but a pointed hold.

"Stay," he said, and his voice managed not to sound so needy.

"Stay?"

He sloshed his words around in his mouth, frowned. "…It helps me sleep."

Hannibal considered him, then twisted and laid down on the makeshift bed. He rolled onto his side, propped his head up with his arm, and considered Will, much the same way he had when Will first met his eyes so long before. Triumphant; mischievous.

"Then I'll stay," he allowed. "Only because you ask it of me."

In their small, cramped space, he slipped a hand beneath Will's loose-fitting t-shirt and traced idle designs along the scarred smile on his stomach until he fell asleep.

-

"How many safe houses do you have?" Will asked wearily, staring up at one such place. It was out of the way of Paris, along a rustic countryside where he'd witnessed maybe one sheep and a boy scuffing his feet along the side of the road. Another wheelchair had been removed from the trunk of the car for ease of transport, and he'd be damned glad to never see them again. Chiyoh wheeled him up the small ramp to the side of the entry, and he tried to rub sleep from his eyes.

"Enough," Hannibal said simply.

Rather than the sharp, stark cutting architecture that cut a perfect backdrop against the craggy rocks of the Cliffside, the new safe house was more along the lines of a pleasant cottage with a large, spacious interior. It was easy for Will to be moved to a room with –god forbid –yellow trim and white lattices along the windows. Chiyoh left him there in order to get the bags, and he stared at the white lace curtains with disgruntled annoyance.

"You don't like the room?"

"Is this the master bedroom?"

"Of course not," Hannibal said, affronted. "This is a guest room."

"We shared the master bedroom at the other place," said Will, glancing at the vanity in the corner. Through the old, faded mirror, he blanched at just how ragged his face looked, stitches on both sides of his face where the bullet went through. No teeth shattered, though. No gums obliterated. Either Will opened his mouth at just the right time, or Dolarhyde just wanted to wound him enough for a fight, and the bastard wanted to show off while doing it.

"I was unsure as to whether or not you'd want to continue sharing a room," Hannibal said –was that a fucking smirk? Will looked at him from the reflection of the mirror, and he scowled.

"You want me to ask to share a room with you," he said. "I won't ask. I'm sleeping in the master bedroom, and you can do what you want."

He wheeled himself towards the master bedroom, far more pleased with the mellow, calming blues and cherry-colored wood. The yellow was too bright, too cheery for his rather rough and ragged appearance. It reminded him of Molly, blue coveralls stained with her attempts at making the kitchen appear larger than it was.

He climbed onto the bed and eased himself back, sighing. Sitting in a wheelchair took a lot more out of him than he imagined it would.

That night, he was more than pleased to wake up to Hannibal climbing into bed beside him, not giving voice to his acquiescence of Will's forced presence, but rather silently accepting it. He dosed him again, checked his stiches, and told Will he was healing *wonderfully*.

He helped Will brush his teeth, although Will drew the line at Hannibal changing him into something more comfortable than just sweats. A dark blue pajama set that Chiyoh had been kind enough to go and get for him, Hannibal said, like he hadn't sent her to get it. Will was able to dress himself just fine, thank you.

When Hannibal tucked him underneath light, summer covers, the pain medicine making him too dazed to be aware of his surroundings, he grabbed him by the front of his own burgundy pajama set and tugged him close enough to kiss, all teeth and lips and something drenched in an emotion he couldn't voice but certainly felt. Hannibal smiled against Will's mouth, like he held the key to a lovely secret.

Will dreamt of a thousand stars in an endless sky, the warmth of something that tasted like a reality rather than just a dream.

Chapter End Notes

:)

So I have no words? Like...I really don't. Except thank you. We have one chapter left, and that basically will wrap up this world and everything within it. Idk how to really feel about that.

Also, there was a lovely, beautiful art piece an anonymous person contributed to this work, and I'd love to have it posted here so that you guys can see. Idk how to do that kind of fancy stuff, but I will give the link to the artist's work since it's absolutely lovely and amazing and you guys just have to see it! :) https://le-wendigogo.tumblr.com/post/162891791202/he-tilted-his-head-held-his-palm-out-to-will-as-a

Song Inspiration: 'Human' by Of Monsters and Men

One Eye Blue, the Other Maroon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 20:

The town their farmhouse was adjacent to had mostly elderly soulmates and a few young couples taking over the deeds to their families' homes. Will and Hannibal fit right in with their mismatched eyes and their marriage certificate.

Will made him change their names to something a little less obviously fake.

"If I was looking for us, these names stand out like a god damn beacon," he said, jabbing a finger down. "We're not hiding away in Germany, Christ's sake."

When his stitches were finally removed under the expert hand of Dr. Lecter, Will said thank you by grabbing him by the face and kissing him with a ravenous sort of hunger bordering on animalistic.

That was when they discovered that organic olive oil made an excellent lubricant when one was in a pinch and overcome with a myriad of emotions in a kitchen.

The next day was when Chiyoh decided that she was going to leave them to their own devices and found her way back to the Lecter estate in Lithuania where there was peace and a genuine level of absolute quiet.

-

"I'm not sure, Dr. Falau, I just…what if the only reason we connected is because we're both here and it's convenient?"

"Do you suppose that it makes it any less important?"

"What if that's the only reason?"

"What if the only reason you went on a date with someone in a larger city is because they complimented the bow in your hair. Does that invalidate it?"

The girl shifted in her chair, hand reaching up to brush against the bow Will mentioned. "It'd be more of a coincidence than-"

"Soulmates aren't fate," Will assured her. "They are a chemical connection that your brain causes when it comes across something that it finds kinship with. Think of it as your subconscious noticing something about them that resonates within yourself. Your subconscious knows you far better than you do, yes?"

"So then…I should give it a try?"

“You can’t say whether or not it will work out simply because the two of you are soulmates, but it does build a foundation. It’s a choice to be with a soulmate, Greta. The difference between that and any other person is the body’s conscious decision beforehand to give you the advantage of being able to sense them.”

“How long have you been with your soulmate, Dr. Falau?”

A pause as he thought, fingers brushing against the scar still very much visible on his cheek. For anxious clients, it made them curious enough to break the ice. He hated the staring, though. “About ten months now.”

“Was it easy?” she asked.

He looked at the space just below her eyes, where it’d appear like he was meeting her mismatched, one-blue-one-brown-gaze. “Oh, no,” he said without hesitation. “Not in the least.”

“You’d say…it’s worth it, though?”

“There is no definitive answer to that,” he replied, but as her expression fell, he continued, “however; I will say that there is no one in this world that understands me better than he does. In turn, I understand him. There have been studies to conclude that part of why soulmates even first began was mankind’s desire and need to connect. We fostered that connection through experiences together and decided to continue building that relationship through new experiences.”

“She’s…what if we get to know one another, and in the end it’s not enough?”

“Then you’re no worse off than before, aren’t you?” At her realization, he nodded knowingly. “Except, you’d have someone that would, at the very least, be a friend to you. There is nothing in the world that says a soulmate has to be a romantic relationship.”

“Why did you leave the states to come here and work, Dr. Falau? Was it because of your soulmate?”

Will smiled wryly, made a note at the bottom of his notepad. “In a manner of speaking, yes.”

As she left and he closed down his small office, his hand passed along the back of the chair where she’d dug her shoulders in. She was scared of abandonment. She was scared to trust, to put herself in a position where all would be lost if she wasn’t enough. He felt her fears like a bad heat rash, and he left work, locking his office door behind him.

He wandered through town, picked up a paper, made a call. Outside of a café, he idly bit his thumb and nodded in appreciation as it went to voicemail; it always went to voicemail. Once, he’d have thought that it was a sign he wasn’t welcome to call at all, until he got a voicemail back that asked if he was alright two weeks after he’d stopped making his calls.

"Hey, Molly," he murmured. "I was happy to see you dating someone. Two brown eyes like coffee beans. Diego, right? Diego. Yours are still two blues, and they look great.

"I'm still working, getting a small established clientele. Same work, but it's…better. I feel better about it. I don't feel so…afraid." He nodded to the barista that left him with a cup of straight black coffee, and he smiled a little. "Everything's…fine here. Quiet. My head is quiet, and you used to tell me how loud it always got when I thought too much.

"I'm happy you're in California now, far away from everyone and everything. I hope things are quiet for you, too, and the shop you're selling soaps in is doing okay. If you get orders from Beverly, let me know and I'll toss in something, my treat. If Jack comes knocking, just close the door in his face." He stirred cream into the coffee, sipped it. "You always wanted to slam a door in his face.

"My kidney is fine, but I did get checked out at a real hospital to make sure everything was in order. Don't worry about me; I've got a doctor on call.

"Anyway, just…saying hello. Saying I'm sorry, like always. Saying I'm alive, and no one's eaten me." A beat. "Yet." Bad humor. He tried again. "Saying, I think even though it hurt a lot, this was better for you in the long run, and maybe it was better for me, too. I think so, at least. You deserved more than what I could give.

"Hope to hear from you soon."

He sat out in the late afternoon sun and enjoyed his cup of coffee and a bagel, fingers tapping lazily on the glass table. Usually it was about a week before he'd get a voicemail back, assuring him of her success and her life. Nothing slowed Molly down, least of all someone like Will. For that he was grateful, that no amount of his actions had ruined her – merely detained. Merely redirected.

He checked his e-mail, found one from another familiar name.

Dr. Falau,

Thank you for getting back to me so quickly. I'm interested in studying abroad, at your recommendation for my first year of graduate school, but I'm having a difficult time deciding exactly where I'd like to spend my semester. There is a lot of opportunity in France, although I've heard great things about Italy, too. What do you recommend, in your line of work? Soulmate studies have been my primary focus, although there are a lot of credits towards criminal psychology and forensics. I've been trying to keep my options open, but after your last post in the psychiatric journals, I thought you'd be the best to speak with and see the best options for me in the line of work that I want after school.

Thank you for your time,

-Abigail Hobbs

It was a bit of a drive from the city to the farmhouse, but when he arrived he felt the familiar hum in his stomach that told him Hannibal was home from the hospital where he worked. There was another equally familiar tingling at the base of his spine that said he'd done something particularly exciting. Exciting. He marinated over the word, tossed it aside after a thought. Naughty. There, that was better.

Hands massaged and worked over a set of lungs in the kitchen, and Will set his briefcase down at the small breakfast bar, eyeing them with extreme prejudice.

"A good day at work?" Hannibal asked, intent on pressing and massaging the meat. Shirtsleeves were rolled up, exposing forearms and lending him the intense impression of a person deep in the throes of hard, manual work.

"Was it in the city?"

"Évreux," he said genially. "Nowhere close to us."

Will hmm'd low in his throat and tossed his keys on the briefcase. "The crime?"

"Does there have to be a crime?" Hannibal wondered. "Or will you enjoy a fine cooked meal, regardless?"

"You said, 'one must always strive to eat the rude, dear Will.'"

"I didn't say they were the only ones to eat," Hannibal replied.

"Hannibal-"

"It was a rather rude pig," Hannibal assured him. "Ran out into my car, squealed and promptly died where he stood."

"Fuck," Will muttered, and he crossed over to the fridge, grabbing one of the bottles in the back. Hannibal made a beer crafted in wine barrels down in the basement. Will was more than content to let him have free reign of the basement, where all of his other hobbies lay. "Promptly died where he stood, you say."

"We may have stepped aside to discuss the ramifications of faking injuries for the sake of insurance claims."

"And you're so prolific in speaking pig," Will agreed. He walked behind him so that he could brush against his shoulder, the contact warming, reassuring. Grounding.

"You could join me next time, you know," Hannibal said. "I have a need for someone that knows how to knot fishing line."

Will toed the aged stone flooring with his shoe, shook his head. It was a topic of conversation that sometimes arose, when his darker thoughts took hold and the only person there to keep his head afloat was Hannibal. He'd held back though, refrained. Hannibal was his paddle out of dark places, not because Hannibal didn't want him there, but because Will asked him to be. Truth be told, he had a mild weakness for Will saying 'please'.

“The social worker that was abusing one of his cases got off due to mishandled evidence,” he said instead. “He walked free.”

“The one hurting your friend, Peter Bernardone?”

“Yes.”

“What does that make you dwell on?” Hannibal asked. He lifted a knife and began cutting in swift, smooth strokes. “Nothing tasty, I’d imagine.”

“Nothing tasty,” Will agreed.

“A rather rude little pig, wouldn’t you say?”

“…I’d say, ‘Let the law deal with him.’”

“The law did deal with him, Will. The experience left you wanting, a breath not-quite taken in full.”

“It’s fine,” Will said. “I think the people down the road at the church left a pamphlet on the door that said ‘Let God Handle It.’ If not the law, then God, I figure.”

“God recently dropped an airplane with 124 people on it out of the sky just two days ago; I’m sure he’d let you have Clark Ingram.”

Of course Hannibal remembered his name, although Will had only mentioned it once. “Clark Ingram is a pig,” Will said slowly, “but I don’t know if he’s the kind of pig I want.”

A quiet hum of assent. “Let me know if you change your mind, dear Will.” At Will’s short, curt nod, he smiled slightly, a flash of incisors. “Freddie Lounds spotted us in Scotland today.”

“That lousy-” Will’s voice broke off, and he gripped his pint tightly. “Is she still calling us…that…”

“Murder husbands?”

“Lousy, lying shit,” he swore. Raked hands through his hair, scrubbed the back of his neck.

“I was riveted by her use of prose in our murderous entanglements,” Hannibal said, watching him move about agitatedly. He tossed the cubed lungs into the pan and began searing them, the hissing and spitting of the meat drowning out most of Will’s curses.

“Out of anyone in the world, I’d-”

“Yes?” Hannibal prompted serenely, tilting the pan.

“…Across the god damn world and she’s still running her piece of shit articles,” he finished. Redirected. “I can’t be drugged and dragged through Canada and across the ocean

in peace, not while she's alive."

"A shame the Great Red Dragon didn't go after her instead of Chilton," Hannibal drawled. "Then again, you put your hand on his shoulder, not hers."

That stopped Will. Made him look around at Hannibal with an expression twisted between disgruntled fury and a flicker of something mildly resembling shame. Not his proudest moment, although one of his most calculating. He'd woken many nights with the sensation of fire just underneath his skin, Chilton's lipless curses hot in his ears. It'd taken a lot of whispered reassurances, promises that he was Will Graham and not Frederick Chilton before the embers had faded off of his charred skin, before blackened skin faded to red, faded to a tan found only on those that wore suits to work for a living.

Mornings after nights like that, Hannibal always played music in the small, antique parlor towards the back of the house while Will lay on the rug, hands pressed over his eyes. Hannibal never pitied him, though. He said the most beautiful thing that Will had that Hannibal didn't was his ability to both be the sculptor and the beaten stone. Will would press his hands harder to his eyes and begrudgingly agree. There was something beautiful in the broken, something delicious in the damned.

"Dr. Chilton's skin grafts came along nicely," Hannibal told him, a peace offering.

"…Good," he managed.

Lung and loin bourguignonne for dinner, and a pint of beer aged in a chardonnay barrel. Will savored it, savored the sensation that only one glass was enough. He also savored that *his* plate contained lung from a cow, not from a *pig*.

He later tinkered in the living room, spread out along the floor beside a boat motor and his tools. Hannibal read a book nearby, a pretentious copy of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* in one hand and a glass of Malbec in the other. Anytime Will let out a particularly curt grunt or curse, he'd glance up from his book, take a sip of his drink.

"Mr. Petit will be thankful you're putting so much work into his engine," Hannibal noted after a particularly loud curse.

"He's going to let me fish in the lake."

"Your true motives revealed."

"I think we should get a dog," said Will, setting down a wrench and scratching his cheek. He felt the oil smear, knew that the longer it sat there the more agitated Hannibal would become before he'd find some excuse or other to pass by and wipe it off with the spare rag Will kept somewhere nearby. "Petit said he saw a stray roaming around, no tags."

"I was thinking of Florence," Hannibal replied. He set his glass down on the end table.

"So soon?"

“I promised you Florence.”

“They allow dogs in Florence,” Will pointed out. He grabbed a washer and ducked back down to fumble with a screw. “Molly and I were going to get a dog a year ago, before Jack turned up.”

“I’m flattered that what took years for you to want with Molly merely took months with me,” Hannibal said with a smile. “How is she?”

Will didn’t miss the flicker of mild distaste at his own question. While he didn’t condemn Will for calling, he didn’t approve, either. He was of the assumption that sooner or later she was going to take all of his voicemails and deliver them to Jack with a hand-written note on just how to find them based off of context clues. Will figured he knew Molly better than Hannibal did, and that was that.

“Good.”

“And Abigail?”

“She’s…going to study abroad. She was debating which country to look at, where to stay, which school she’d attend.” Will gave Hannibal a meaningful look, peeking up from the engine. “She asked my opinion on France or some other place.”

“…You’d overrun my house with strays,” Hannibal murmured.

“Our house,” Will corrected.

“Our home.”

They considered one another, small, bare hints of smiles at the edges of their lips. Will broke eye contact and glanced to the motor, twisting a screw into place.

“They’d be house broken,” he commented.

“If it’s within the next Fall semester, tell her Florence,” Hannibal decided.

“Is that a suggestion to look into referrals for my clients?”

“You don’t have to go with me,” Hannibal reminded him.

Will busied himself with wiping small traces of grease off of his fingers with the rag nearby. “You’re not abandoning me in France. I hardly speak French.”

Among other things, like how he’d probably have to quit Hannibal from his system like a drug if he left and Will didn’t follow, the shaking and the aches enough to bruise muscle and break bone. Like how he’d grown so accustomed to being able to have in-depth conversations with the most minimal of words and gestures, someone that *saw* without having to see, someone that *knew* without having to know. Like how he was most entirely sure that he was in love with the bastard, and there wasn’t enough time in the world for him to be able to articulate that in just the right way. He’d tried, but most of the time it was during

moments where words weren't enough, where no matter what he could have said, waxing eloquent or simplistically stated, it didn't quite cover just how much he felt.

That, and he was abysmal at speaking French.

"What words you do say sound wonderful, though," Hannibal praised. There was just enough of a dry note to make Will grimace, tossing the rag down.

"I think I'd speak Italian better."

"With the way you shape your vowels in conjugations, I'd certainly agree."

It was settled. Abigail would visit them in Florence in the fall.

After, as he changed into pajamas, he watched Hannibal watching him through the mirror in the master bedroom. One eye blue, the other maroon.

"Are you just going to look?" he taunted quietly.

"My eyes naturally seek you out in a room, despite my attentions to my reading or my work. Is that normal, Dr. Graham?" Hannibal walked over and slid his hands around his waist, tugging him flush against his chest.

"A side-effect of being soulmates," Will managed. Hannibal dipped his head down, nose gliding along the line of his neck, lips pausing at the artery where his pulse beat steadily.

"Looking would be enough, you know," Hannibal murmured against his skin conversationally. He pressed a deliberate, gentle kiss to the hollow of his throat. Will once tried to call him out on that, but he'd come to learn that Hannibal practically drowned in aesthetics, and Will was his favorite tableau.

"Maybe for you."

He kissed him with a hunger, and Hannibal responded in kind. They made their way back towards the bed, and when Hannibal fell backwards onto it, Will followed, poised over him with a wicked gleam in his eyes. He wanted to touch; he wanted to *touch*.

"This is purely chemical, you know," he said casually, tugging Hannibal's shirt over his head. It was tossed, forgotten somewhere on the floor. They'd retrieve it later –maybe not. Maybe much, much later, after the sun had risen and Hannibal roused him from bed with a cup of coffee.

"So is love; so is anger, so is pain, dear Will," Hannibal murmured against his lips. Will's top was removed with far better finesse, fingers dancing down his spine to rest at the small of his back where hips were guided down to wanting flesh. Hannibal rolled over with him, pinning him down with his weight as a dexterous hand glided along the waistband of his bottoms, plucking teasingly. "It doesn't lessen its importance."

And as he got drunk off of his kisses, the way their hearts beat in time as everything was made to feel *right*, Will figured that no, it very well didn't.

He chose Hannibal, and Hannibal chose him. Somehow, it was more romantic that way.

Chapter End Notes

Here we are, everyone :)

I just want to say thank you to everyone for all of your support, excitement, and kindness while I wrote this. This has been such a lovely, wonderful experience, made so much better by all of you taking the time to be so supportive and amazing every step of the way. Thank you for all of you that have done photosets and shared posts, and thank you to the anon that commissioned art for this. It's just beyond real for me <3

It's kind of a bittersweet feeling because I've had so much fun writing this, and I don't want it to end! Their arc is officially over, though, and in the words of one of you guys who commented on the last chapter, 'I feel like we can finally leave them alone together without supervision.' :)

Even though this one is ending, I have just started 2 others that are a few chapters in: The Unquiet Grave and Ill Intentions. If you're still looking for more soulmate au's from this world build, within the next few days I should have a new soulmate au posted, so stay tuned for that! Details for it are kind of semi-hashed out on my tumblr page.

Song Inspiration: Stolen by Dashboard Confessional

End Notes

You can find me on Tumblr as Elfnerdherder -come say hello! Signal boosts, messages, and requests always welcome.

Works inspired by this one

[Restricted Work] by marlahanni

El Diablo by Prince_Ofluff

I keep closing my eyes (but I can't blink you out) by fakehaunting

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!